

# SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2021

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## It's Showtime!

We are delighted to announce that our Honey Show will be going ahead this year on 18 September at St. John's Church Hall, Foxbush, Hildenborough. The show is open to all members, so if you have never entered before, please do so. With 23 classes there is something for everyone. The show will be judged by a BBKA accredited judge, according to BBKA show rules. Top tip: read the schedule and the rules, and follow them scrupulously. The only exception is class 23, where you can let your imagination run free, and if you can get it into the hall, bring it along!

If you have any questions, please contact Richard, who is the Entries Secretary. His contact details are on the schedule and rules.

Anyone who won a trophy at the 2019 show should bring it along on the day, or return it to Richard in advance because we display the trophies at the show. Winners will be presented with trophies at the AGM after we have had the chance to engrave the recipient's name on the base.

St. John's Church Hall is next to St John's Church, which is the large church just north of the junction of Riding Lane and Tonbridge Road in Hildenborough. There is a large free car park behind the hall.

*Liz Birchenough, Membership Secretary and Treasurer*

*The National Honey Show will take place on 21-23 October at Sandown Park. You can find full details on their website: [www.honeyshow.co.uk](http://www.honeyshow.co.uk)*

## Assessing the Queens at Barrwood



*Learning to turn a frame*

We generally have a few new beekeepers at our meetings and they are introduced to the art and given hands-on practice from the start. Thanks to Sue Knights, who has become very adept at teaching, we have been able to divide those attending into small groups.

Following the queen raising in May, nucleus colonies that were successfully building up strength were moved into full brood boxes. Unfortunately, the indifferent weather has meant that many of the queens were poorly mated, with a number of what had appeared to be successful queens now developing the drone-laying signs caused by mating with too few drones.

In the last newsletter Peter Hutton advised: "get extra supers on now" and that is exactly what we did. The established hives were given extra supers to make the most of the chestnut flowering season which seemed to be extra prolific this year. There isn't really a 'flow' at Barrwood, but in July we finally witnessed the bees bringing in excess stores and wax being produced without the need for supplementary feeding. Now is the time to assess these colonies to keep the best queens and remove the less desirable ones.

At our last meeting of the month, with storms forecast, the bees were disturbed by the rapidly changing air pressure. It made our assessment of which queens to keep, and which to replace, very much clearer.

*Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman*



*Swarm or supersedure?*

## Swarms Galore at Hilbert Road



Meetings at Hilbert Road have continued each Monday with varying numbers attending. Hives have been inspected and new members have had a chance to handle bees on combs and to identify eggs and brood at all stages. They have also witnessed the capture and marking of two queens and spotted another on a flight board.

We have been busy again with swarms. New beekeeper Paddy and I took a swarm in Powder Mill Lane, St John's. Peter Hutton and I collected one from the pavement at the gates of Hilbert Road, which went straight into a hive without much persuasion. The apiary is also now home to another swarm I took from a bush in High Brooms. We also divided one of our colonies so we now have eight hives at Hilbert Road.

More hive parts have been rescued from destruction and cleaned, and further shelving has been installed in the beehouse and storage shed. Three more chairs in good condition have been acquired and stored, and five honey buckets have been obtained.

*(pictured left: After taking a swarm, Paddy smokes the tree to cover the scent of the queen and prevent the swarm from re-assembling.)*

We have had a new quote for repairs to the store shed roof and are hoping to be able to carry out the work soon. We are planning to build a lean-to, so we can cover equipment rather than leaving it exposed to the elements. I am going to do this with the help of some members and with timber which I obtained without charge.

New member Martin has supplied a basic assessment paper and I propose to work through this with members.

It remains to be seen whether we will have a honey crop at the end of the month given the poor weather and the time taken to build up numbers of productive hives.  
*Vic Webb, Hilbert Road Apiary manager*

*(pictured right: Peter Hutton demonstrates how calm swarms can be by wearing no protective clothing as he makes sure the bees process into the hive.)*



## Hilbert Road Apiary Meetings

Hilbert Rd apiary will be open every Monday morning from 11am.

## Barrwood Apiary Meetings

Tuesday 10 August at 2pm: Supers will be sorted and porter escapes added ready for extraction.

Friday 13 August at 10am: Honey extraction at Cliff Hayward's house. If you would like to help, please phone Cliff on 01732 750885 as numbers may have to be limited. It's an ideal opportunity for new beekeepers.

Saturday 21 August at 2pm: Colony health checking.

## Hives For Sale



Warre top bar hive: £80 *(pictured)*

Includes floor, three brood boxes with bars, crown board and roof.

National hive with side viewing windows: £80

Includes stand, floor, one brood box with frames, two supers with frames, crown board, roof.

For more information contact Bret on 07871 098989

To see more pictures go to our website:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Hives-for-sale-1.pdf>

## Beekeeping in August

The main flow of nectar has concluded spectacularly with torrential rain, lightning, flooding and, in between, areas that have remained dry. It is time to put in clearer boards if you have surplus honey to extract. Bees, in my view, overwinter better with their own honey rather than syrup. They will now need re to be treated with a varroacide once any extractable honey has been removed. If you are fortunate enough to be extracting honey put the empty supers back at night time to be cleaned up as putting them back during the day can lead to immediate robbing.

Hive entrances now require reduction as there will be a dearth of nectar coming and with a large number of bees still in the hives, many will be on the lookout for poorly guarded honey to steal. Robbing between colonies, once started, is difficult to stop, so you should close entrances to perhaps 2-3 cm. If your bees become victims then shut the hive completely and remove to another site at least a mile or two distant.

As we move into autumn the last few beneficial nectar bearing plants, Himalayan Balsam and Heather will bolster the bees' winter food, as will Ivy.

If you have reared some spare queens which have now mated before the drones are dispatched then you can divide up a strong colony now whilst there are sufficient bees to raise further brood. If you have a queenless colony, however, it is too late to raise a new queen since in 16 to 28 days there may be insufficient drones or none at all to provide sperm. The best solution will be to unite very small colonies (fewer than three frames of bees).

I recommend reading the interview with Professor Goulson in the August BeeCraft, in particular he refers to the stocking levels of bees in an area and the reasons so many people have taken up beekeeping. Unlike sheep, cows and horses, where one can see how many acres of pasture are required per animal, with honeybees foraging over three kilometres in any direction, you cannot judge whether there is enough forage to sustain more than a certain number of colonies. I know only too well about overstocking of honeybees. Where I kept 25 hives another beekeeper moved in with 14 hives and another with 10, on top of the smaller beekeepers nearby. Overpopulation causes all sorts of problems, including a poor crop and starvation. Five years ago a commercial beekeeper moved into an already saturated area with 150 colonies. He has now moved all of his hives down into Sussex.

If you are attending the introduction to beekeeping course planned by the branch, do ask for advice on the best hives to buy. I think there are now too many fashionable hives on the market at exorbitant prices. My advice to students has always been, do not spend too much money when you are starting out. There is generally a good number of second hand hives for sale.

*Peter Hutton, Branch President*

## How to Collect a Swarm



If you see a bees swarm and you have never collected a swarm before it's a lot easier than you might imagine. Prepare the ground underneath with a large, thin cloth or net curtain, weighted down if it's windy. This will stop the bees that miss the skep from getting tangled up in the grass. If it's just out of reach, use whatever comes to hand, for example a broom, to shake the branch. With luck the majority of the bees will fall into your skep, which should ensure you have the queen. Place the skep in the middle of the sheet on a stone or small flower pot to create an entrance for the remaining flying bees. The queen pheromone will undoubtedly still be on the branch so a few bees will remain there for some time. It's therefore best to leave the skep until dusk when they should all finish huddled up around the queen on the ground. Then wrap them up for transportation.

*John Farrow*

*(pictured left: Swarm co-ordinator, John Farrow, in action)*

Follow the link to our website for more pictures:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Collecting-a-Swarm-for-the-1st-Time.pdf>

## “He’s Here, He’s Here!”

On previous occasions when I have collected swarms from the Riverhead Parkland area they have always been at high level and this one was no exception. I had to use my extendable 5m pole to reach it.



As there are double yellow lines in this area I had to gain access through a parish councillor’s back garden.

The swarm was over one of the Parkland pathways, so I had to secrete my skep for safety away from the footpath behind a carved alligator/serpent. This picture shows me upturning my skep on a white sheet to await collection that evening, when all the bees would have settled.

In the meantime, the parish councillor’s young grandson arrived after school and recorded a video with charming and amusing commentary all about this ‘bee infestation’.

So, I had quite an audience that evening when I called to collect the swarm with the young, excited grandson jumping up and down saying: “He’s here, he’s here”.

On the way back through his grandmother’s garden he prompted a discussion with me about the strength of a hexagon shape versus other shapes. I think he’s definitely a potential new beekeeper in the making.

*John Farrow, Swarm Co-ordinator*

### Indoor Talks Are Back

Our indoor meetings begin in person again next month after being conducted on Zoom during the pandemic. The first one will be on Tuesday September 21 at 7.30pm at Weald Memorial Hall, Long Barn Road, Sevenoaks Weald, TN14 6PT.

Andrew Gibb will give a talk called: Drone psychology; the weaker sex? Andrew is Chief Executive Officer of BeeCraft Limited, and co-author (with Ann Harman) of Bee Space to Bee Hive, and Bee Hive to Beekeeper.

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

Send pictures or items for the newsletter to [marystaffurth@yahoo.com](mailto:marystaffurth@yahoo.com)