

# SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2022

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## Keeping Pace with the Bees



What an exceptional year this has been. With no apparent June gap, bees were filling supers continuously from May. Running out of supers, an extra apiary meeting was scheduled mid-week to make up extra frames. These were soon drawn out and filled.

Colony number 8, despite donating most of its workforce to populating the nucs during queen-raising earlier in the year, had supers stacked over head height and was then building comb in the roof space. Queens were being restricted in their laying capacity.

With the real possibility of this year's queens trying to swarm again, the honey harvest was brought forward from its scheduled date at the beginning of August.

*Cliff Hayward, Chairman & Barrwood Apiary Manager*



## Bumper Honey Harvest



Reading Beecraft's long running 'Drifting' articles, where they interview beekeepers, it would appear that one of the most disliked facets of beekeeping is extracting the honey (*writes Cliff Hayward*).



I can only recommend they attend our Branch honey extraction 'party' to rediscover what an enjoyable pastime it is.

Seven members, including three for whom it was a new experience, gathered around a selection of odd trays and kitchen knives with a couple of extractors to set about harvesting a bumper crop for the Branch. While we worked, the conversation flowed. As usual, it began with bees, but moved on to a whole spectrum of topics.

Beekeeping brings together people from a wide mix of backgrounds and interests so a

thoroughly enjoyable afternoon was spent to produce something in the region of 200lb of honey.

It was great to welcome some of our newer members who had attended the recent honey workshop and were able to hone their new uncapping skills (*writes Liz Birchenough*). Some of the honey had begun to granulate in the comb, which was a useful demonstration for the members. Although there was not a lot of oilseed rape this year, the brambles flowered early and could be responsible for the granulation.



Cliff will be returning the empty supers for the bees to clean out, and the cappings will be put in a feeder tray for them. It took about three hours to complete the honey extraction.

Thanks to all who helped out (*adds Cliff*), and thank you especially to Martin who stepped in to run the Barrwood meeting while I was helping to harvest the honey. The quote of the afternoon goes to Zelda: as a dentist, she had a different idea of what an extraction party would be!



## August in the Apiary

*By Peter Hutton*

Wasps are now leaving their nests and becoming a nuisance around the hive entrances; it is important that you reduce the entrance blocks to the smallest aperture to help the decreasing number of hive bees to fight off intruders.

The major flows of nectar have now ceased. Ragwort and a few other flowers are still providing pollen and some nectar, which will now go into the brood nest as the queen reduces egg laying. When the bees return covered in flour-like pollen that is the penultimate flow from the Himalayan balsam before the last flow of ivy nectar.

My wife has extracted 116 lbs of honey from two Dadant supers and there are still three more supers on that hive and three on the adjacent Dadant. I have five skyscrapers on the home apiary and a reasonable crop on my other out-apiaries.

For those of you new to beekeeping, and extracting honey for the first time, there are two main types of extractors: radial and tangential, both hand or machine operated. The tangential extractor spins out the honey from one side of the comb at a time, the combs must only be spun slowly until both sides have been emptied. Reverse the combs and direction for the second side to be extracted. Combs in the tangential extractor must be the right way round, the bottoms of the combs are the leading edge and therefore face the direction in which the drum rotates. The cells of the comb have an upward slope. You can purchase an extractor that has self-rotating cages that turn the combs automatically when you reverse the motor.

The radial extractor spins the honey out from both sides. The top bars being nearest to the extractor side wall ensure that when loading frames the top bar stays within the bottom support and that the level of honey never rises above the centre bush nor reaches the top bar as this will act as a brake. This applies to tangential extractors as well.

The balance of full combs is important: heavy combs need to be opposite each other, likewise for light combs. Unbalanced combs cause the extractor to wander and even fall over; castors fitted to the extractor feet remove this type of imbalance. Imbalance can still occur if some combs contain granulated honey. Such combs can be warmed to 30-35°C to liquefy the honey.

If you are using the branch extractors ensure you have the correct loading and use instruction. Loss of the bottom ball bearing will cause irreparable damage so check before you use these extractors that they contain the bottom ball bearing. If you are using the motorised extractor you should ensure the motor is switched off when stationary and being loaded or unloaded because of the risk of overheating.

## Honey workshop



A group of members met at Weald Memorial Hall on the hottest day on record for our first honey workshop. So, huge thanks to everyone who made the effort to participate, especially those who helped extract a couple of buckets of honey in advance for us to use to demonstrate filtering and bottling - at least there was no need to warm the honey! We started with a short discussion about selecting the best supers to extract, and how much should be left with the bees as stores. We then moved on to uncapping, demonstrated by Cliff Hayward, looking at the different types of tools available, in particular using existing kitchen equipment rather than specialist tools.

We had previously decided not to try extracting during the workshop due to the time available, but we did have a look at a small extractor, and talked through some of the points such as cleaning techniques, and how not to lose the ball bearing at the bottom of the central shaft.

We then put a bucket of honey through a filter, and while that was draining we all took a well-earned break for refreshment. Sue Knights had brought some different honey samples for tasting, and introduced members to how to present honey for the show. She also explained the process of natural granulation. Finally, she explained the rules about labelling should anyone be thinking about selling honey in the future.

Once the honey was filtered, members had a go at filling some jars with particular attention to filling to the correct level. Cliff then talked through the preparation of cut comb and soft set honey.

At the end of a very interesting, albeit hot, meeting there were some buckets and jars available for sale, and members were able to buy their newly filled jars.

*Liz Birchenough*



## Congratulations

Martin Barrett passed his BBKA basic exam.

Richard Smith achieved a credit for his basic exam.

## Branch Honey Show

The Honey Show will be on Saturday 1st October at St John's Church Centre, Hildenborough. The rules and schedule have been sent to you with this newsletter. All members are welcome to submit entries, so even those of you without your own bees can enter the photography, handicraft or baked goods classes. There are also novice classes for anyone who has not won a honey class previously, so if you are new to beekeeping you can still enter with confidence.

## For Sale: Top Bar Hive

Roof needs some attention but otherwise sound. All bars present.

Available Tunbridge Wells, free to collector

Guy Eve: 07507 557703 / [guyeve61@gmail.com](mailto:guyeve61@gmail.com)

## South of England Honey Show

The South of England Honey Show will take place at the Ardingly Showground on 24th and 25th September. Schedule and entry forms are available at [www.seas.org.uk/competing-autumn-show-horse-trials](http://www.seas.org.uk/competing-autumn-show-horse-trials)

## Clever Bees

You can follow this link to a Guardian article about scientific research that suggest bees are even more intelligent than we imagined:

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2022/jul/16/bees-are-really-highly-intelligent-the-insect-iq-tests-causing-a-buzz-among-scientists>

### Diary Dates

**Saturday August 6: Apiary meeting** at 2pm at Barrwood Apiary

**Sunday August 7: Apiary meeting** at 11am at Hilbert Road

**Saturday August 20: Apiary meeting** at 2pm at Barrwood Apiary

**Sunday August 21: Apiary meeting** at 11am at Hilbert Road Apiary

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)