

**SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS
BEEKEEPERS
BRANCH NEWSLETTER
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Carpentry Workshop

Despite freezing temperatures, there was an excellent turnout of members for the first meeting in 2023. Rather than a lecture, the topic was on basic carpentry skills which we all need (and often forget) for constructing brood boxes and supers. However, at the start of the meeting we had a short interlude. Cliff presented Sally Jones with the Carter Cup she won at the branch honey show for two jars of clear honey presented by a novice beekeeper.



On the business of carpentry, Cliff opened with a short slide presentation of the most common types of hive parts members will come across, highlighting the subtle differences in construction. We then took a look at the practicalities. The biggest problem beekeepers come across is getting the levels of the frame support rails correctly positioned so the top of the frames align neatly with the top of the box. The instructions do give dimensions but no two boxes are exactly the same, so the top tip is to use a frame as a guide and mark the position of the bottom edge of the frame top bar at both ends carefully, and use this to position the side rails.

Cliff also reminded everyone of the importance of checking that the sides of the box were square and the base level, otherwise the various sections will not stack correctly. A carpenter's set square is the best tool for this. These come in various sizes, the smaller ones (150mm) are easiest to use for checking the internal corners.

The most unexpected tip came from Chris Stewart. There is always a danger of splitting the timber when driving large nails close to the edge so Chris recommended gently blunting the tip of the nail. When the nail is sharp, the tip passes between the wood fibres and can

exacerbate a split. If the tip of the nail is blunted, the wood fibres are broken as the nail passes through, which apparently reduces splitting.

To finish off the evening, a frame-making production line was set up to prepare frames for the branch apiaries.

Thanks to everyone who braved the weather, especially committee members who brought along tools, work benches and hive parts to construct.

Liz Birchenough

Introduction to Beekeeping

Our second Introduction to Beekeeping event this season took place on Sunday 22 January. Despite a bitterly cold day, there was a full house of new beekeepers eager to learn some of the basic practicalities needed when thinking about becoming a beekeeper. As with all our previous courses, many of the questions were related to how much time and cost was involved, and the practicalities of setting up an apiary at home. Everyone has different constraints, but we aimed to provide the delegates with sufficient information to enable them to decide if they would be able to manage a safe and healthy apiary.

We are looking forward to welcoming a number of new members to the branch apiaries in the spring to get some hands-on experience under supervision before embarking on setting up their own apiaries.

Liz Birchenough

Prepare for Spring and Check on Fondant

By Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman



January: cold, then wet, then cold and wet. For the bees, it has meant an extended period of being huddled together in the hive, relying on stores. February: often worse.

At least the day length is noticeably increasing and the first of the snowdrops are showing. February may stay cold and wet but by the end of the month on those occasional breaks from the bleak, we can expect Hazel catkins to be supplying the first pollen to those bees that venture out. Don't be tempted to open the hive, though. It can be frustrating but when you have seen no activity at the entrance the bees may still be huddling in the centre and by taking the crown board off you will simply release the warm air and rapidly cool the bees. There is really nothing you can do inside the hive. Conversely, do check on any fondant you may have given the colony last year. Although for months it may remain untouched, the increase in the queen's egg-laying rate will mean a big increase in the rate of energy consumption by the workers.

Branch apiary meetings start again at the end of this month. Apart from checking on stores, the first meetings are concerned with checking the stored equipment. In the case of Barrwood, another tree has fallen so clearing the paths will be a priority. We would also like to plug some of the gaps in the hedge. If anyone can donate any suitable native hedgerow plants, which they would otherwise just weed out, we would be grateful.

This year's programme is being distributed with this newsletter. There is currently no member's social apiary visit, so it would be nice if we could have a volunteer. This is always a pleasant get together where the emphasis seems as much on the tea and cake as the beekeeping. You don't need a large operation: just a few hives is fine, and you don't need to be highly experienced. So, if you are prepared to open up your apiary/garden sometime in the summer to a group of beekeepers and there is space to park a number of cars close by then please contact me to volunteer.

At our next indoor meeting Bob Smith will talk about comb change methods, their reason and timing. Bob is always entertaining with descriptions of his own experiments and failures that shows that he really has practised what he promotes. It may seem like a long time until we can start proper beekeeping but preparation for the season starts early, and things happen surprisingly rapidly.

The Last of Summer's Nectar



This photo won second place for Cliff and Pauline Hayward in the branch honey show

Beecraft Update

After many years of service, Katie Butcher retired from her post as Secretary and General Manager for Beecraft at the end of January. The fact that Beecraft arrives regularly and on time is entirely down to her organisation and attention to detail when membership secretaries are constantly bombarding her with changes of address and other such details. I have written to Katie on behalf of the membership to thank her constant support for beekeepers, and wish her well for the future.

Liz Birchenough

Branch Honey For Sale

Branch honey is still available at £7.50 for a 1lb jar, and £6 for a 12oz jar. If you are buying this for family or friends, please remember the honey is not pasteurised, and therefore not suitable for infants under 12 months or expectant mothers. Available from Liz at membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk



Beekeeping in February

By Peter Hutton



I have kept bees since 1960, having started with the help of an excellent beekeeper, although I first had to open up some brickwork to access the bees. That leads me onto last autumn when I collected quite a sizeable starvation swarm. I fed it profusely until it absconded a few days later. Why? As always there are reasons. Understanding the life of bees, I concluded there were none of wax-building age and because I had run them onto foundation, they departed to a hollow bee tree.

Many of my colonies were bringing in pollen from Hazel in December prior to the cold snap, since then there have been cleansing flights and some pollen collection for short periods when weather permitted. From now to March most colonies will be breeding and many will starve if insufficient nectar is available.

Green woodpeckers were busy again towards the end of January when the ground was frozen. I have fitted more screens around several poly hives and hopefully the frosts will abate.

I may have some bees for sale in the spring. I wish you all a successful season.

February Meetings

Hilbert Road Apiary - Sunday February 19 at 11am: Cleaning and preparation of equipment, clearing up and general gardening duties.

Barrwood Apiary – Sunday February 26 at 2pm: Cleaning and preparation of equipment, clearing up and general gardening duties.

Bob Smith: Keep it Clean - Tuesday 28 February at 7.30pm at Weald Memorial Hall, Sevenoaks Weald. Bob will talk about the different comb change methods. He will explain the reasons for regular comb change, the benefits and timings of each method and to how to balance this with swarm control and honey production.

Training Courses

If you are interested in BBKA training courses you can follow this link to see what is available:

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/pages/shop/department/training-courses>

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