

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2025

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Prepare for the Season

It's February already! This is an extremely difficult month for bees with few opportunities for cleansing flights. Longer hours of daylight will have stimulated the queen into increasing her egg-laying so, at any opportunity workers will be out looking for forage. A sudden cooling can catch them out of the hive.

For the beekeeper, too, it is difficult. Keep an eye on those stores. The bees might have hardly touched that block of fondant since December but now, with the need to increase the core temperature of the hive to raise the brood, they may well rapidly consume it. Make sure you have some in reserve.

Are you ready for the start of the season? All those cleaning equipment jobs should have been done in the autumn, but as there always seemed to be plenty of time you never quite got to finish the job. It might still seem ages before your first inspection and you might not yet need that queen excluder that's currently covered in wax and propolis, but it's important to get things done now. There just isn't the time when the season really gets going and with the current trend for a long, cold, wet spring, beekeeping gets squeezed into a shorter space of time. Our first apiary meetings will be starting soon, when we will be getting the equipment ready and doing general tidying jobs.

Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman

Flying Bees at Hilbert Road

At the close of 2024 we took seven colonies into winter. We tried to ensure that each colony had a super of stores to see them through. Unfortunately, due to the generally poor season with the cold and wet weather a couple of the colonies failed to build up enough stores and these were fed in the autumn to see them through the colder winter months.



On the last Saturday in January, we checked in on the colonies following a rather cold spell. All appeared to be thriving. A few bees were flying, evacuation flights I would think as there is little forage available at this time of year.

Four hives felt quite light, so, to ensure their continued health and happiness, a pat of fondant was placed on the crown board to supplement any remaining stores. We decided to check in again to make sure the storms we have been experiencing have not inflicted any damage.

Sue Knights, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager

February Quiz Night

The Branch is holding a quiz night social event on Tuesday 25th February at Weald Memorial Hall, from 7.30pm. All members and guests will be welcome. This is not a "bee" quiz, so non beekeepers in the team might be useful. Quiz teams can be up to four people, but if you can't raise a team, we will put some together on the day. There will be a raffle and home-made cake. We are asking for a donation of £3 towards refreshments. Please RSVP to membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk so I can make sure we have enough cake. If you can donate a cake or a raffle prize, please also let me know. And don't forget to bring a pen!

Liz Birchenough

2025 Programme

You will see several changes to our usual programme this year. We are being a little more experimental. Members seem more reluctant to come to our evening beekeeping talks. However, our recent, more social meeting approach has been well received. So, we are continuing with the social theme. Our next event will be the quiz night.

In April, Chris Stewart will present *The Good, the Bad, the Ugly and the Beautiful*. This will be a light-hearted talk looking at the range of wildlife you are likely be sharing your garden with, if only you dare to look!
Cliff Hayward

Join a Basic Beekeeping Course

This year we are running a basic beekeeping course. It is designed for beekeepers within their first year or two of beekeeping, who feel they could benefit from a greater understanding of how to manage their bees. It will cover the syllabus of the BBKA's basic course, with the hope that participants will consider taking the examination.

The course will begin with five weekly indoor seminars of theory followed by monthly sessions during the season at our teaching apiaries. Numbers will be limited to 10, to ensure full involvement in the sessions. The indoor part of the course will take place at Hildenborough Community Hall on Wednesday evenings from 7.30pm until 9.30pm, starting on March 12. Cost £75.

Please book with Liz Birchenough at membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

New Year Social

The Plough, in Hildenborough, was the venue for our branch dinner in January. Chris Stewart did a great job of organising the occasion with a bonus event of a quiz and prizes.



You can see more of Paul Abbott's photos of the night on our website by following this link:

[New Years Party 2025 – Sevenoaks Beekeepers Buzzing at The Plough](#)

Looking for an Out-Apiary?

I would like to offer space to your members free of charge in Vestry Road, Sevenoaks. We have several locations behind industrial units, on level ground with parking and surrounded with green space, natural hedgerows and undergrowth with open ground beyond. It is a secure site, with gates and quite peaceful out of hours.

Contact Roger Field, Facilities Manager: 07587552591 / roger.field@bellrockgroup.co.uk

Course for New Beekeepers

Our first Introduction to Beekeeping Day was held on Sunday 27th January. It was great to see a group of new members brave the cold wind to find out about getting started with beekeeping. The course was led by Sue Knights, Liz Birchenough and Martin Barrett. The aim was not to teach people beekeeping in one easy lesson but to make sure new beekeepers have a clear idea of what will be expected of them. Sadly, with so much misinformation about beekeeping on social media, it is very easy to pick up some misleading advice, so our job was to try and be clear and honest about what domestic beekeeping in our part of the UK entails.



We started with an overview of the lifecycle of the queen, workers and drones, and how they co-exist as a super organism being dependent on the survival of all colony members as a whole. Using this basic information, we looked at how this affects what the beekeeper has to do, and how it changes throughout the year. We then moved onto the practicalities of the different types of hive, where to locate them, how much they cost, what sort of spare parts are required plus all the other stuff you need, protective clothing, tools etc. We also discussed basic health and safety for the beekeeper and the bees, emphasising the importance of sensible hygiene precautions, like keeping your gloves and tools clean. One of the updates to the presentation was a report on the Yellow-legged

Hornet. Martin demonstrated some of the simple monitoring stations we have available and explained which ones should be used at different times of the year.

Of course, it is important to be aware of the potential costs involved, and like any new pastime it is possible to spend a medium sized fortune on gadgets that you may never use. So, we had a grown-up conversation about what you really need, what you can do yourself, and what you can hire, share or borrow.

Hopefully everyone went home with a bit of an idea where to start, and some encouragement to come along to the branch apiaries to learn how to handle bees.

The next course on February 16th is fully booked.

Liz Birchenough, Membership Secretary and Treasurer

Swarm Request List 2025

If you have lost bees over the winter and would like to replace them with a swarm, please send your: Name, Address, Landline number & Mobile number by email to John Farrow at: stweditor@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Varroa Resistant Bees

The Sidcup Branch is inviting beekeepers to a lecture by Steve Riley from Westerham branch about breeding varroa resistant bees. It will be on Saturday 8th February at 3 pm at Joydens Wood Community Centre, Birchwood Drive, Dartford DA2 7NE. Parking is quite restricted, so it is advisable to share cars if you can. There is no charge and there will be tea, coffee and home-made cakes afterwards.

Send photos or articles for the newsletter to: marystaffurth@yahoo.com

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