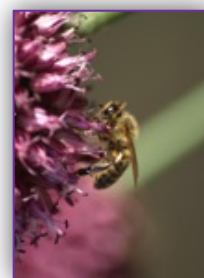


SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER JULY 2025

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The Gory Life of Bees

I was delighted to receive an invitation to address an excited audience of 5- to 11-year-olds at Beechwood School in Tunbridge Wells on World Bee Day. Not knowing quite what to expect but armed with jars of honey and some excellent briefing notes provided by Liz Birchenough, I arrived to find about a hundred children eager to learn more about bees.

We talked about bumble bees and solitary bees and then moved on to honey bees. I soon realised that what these youngsters wanted was violence, gore and death, so I provided lurid descriptions of emerging queens hunting down and killing their mother, of drones fulfilling their destiny and falling dead to the ground during the new queen's mating flight and the ruthless efficiency of the girls evicting the unwanted boys to starve as winter approaches.

A description of honey production was climaxed by me asking who wanted to taste some bee sick? A hundred hands shot up and the honey jars were passed around.

I can't think of a better way to celebrate World Bee Day.

Simon Pope

Hands-on for Scouts at Hilbert Road

Sue Knights and Martin Barrett played host to a group of Scouts at Hilbert Road Apiary in June



We invited the local Pioneer Explorer Scout group to come along and experience the thrill of opening a hive and carrying out an inspection.

It was a warm evening, and everyone was given protective clothing to wear before entering the apiary. Sue made sure they were all buttoned up and ready to go.

The first part was given over to a brief introduction to insects in general and then focused on the life cycle of the bees and the different casts within the colony and the jobs they carry out. We then moved on to lighting

a smoker before gathering around the selected hive for the evening's activity.

The colony was smoked, and the roof removed. There was a gasp as the first bees were spotted around the opening to the crown board. Sue then started the inspection and explained each part of what she was doing. A few of the frames were shaken to remove most of the bees before being handed round for the visitors to see the various stages of brood, honey, nectar and pollen. During the inspection the bees were very well behaved and, as an added bonus, we were fortunate enough to spot the queen.

After closing the hive, we went on to discuss what we had seen and what we could possibly expect to see at the next inspection.



The feedback from the group was positive and we look forward to holding similar sessions in the future.

Martin Barrett

Help Spread the Bee Message

Last year, Kent Scouts raised more than £3,000 for the fight against the Yellow-legged Hornet. This year they are holding an International Jamboree at the Kent Show Ground in Detling and Kent Beekeepers have been asked to man a stall informing scouts about the role of pollinators and to talk about bees. We intend to have an observation hive and there will be an opportunity to sell honey. Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Branch has committed to man the event on Tuesday 5th August, and we are looking for volunteers to help with a morning or afternoon. If you can help contact Cliff Hayward: pbhayward9@hotmail.com

Save the Date - Honey Show and Craft Fair

The Honey Show and Craft Fair will be on Saturday 27th September at St John's Church Centre in Hildenborough. The show will be judged by John Chapman. The rules and schedule will be issued with the August newsletter, along with all the information to make this a great day. As usual, this event will be open to the public, so please invite your friends and neighbours. Any member of the branch, regardless of grade or experience can enter the show. Even if you don't have your own bees, you could submit a cake, a photograph or bee-themed craft item, so don't be shy, give it a try!

Liz Birchenough

Hidden Queen at Barrwood

There was some concern at our first meeting in June because the colony with the new queen seemed restless. Had she failed? Perhaps it was rather early to expect eggs, but they were behaving like a queenless colony. So, I moved a 'spare' colony I had at home to Barrwood and placed it close to this hive. At our next inspection, with the colony still showing signs of queenlessness, it was united with the new colony.



After lifting this queenless colony onto the newspaper on top of the new queenright colony, the reason for the queenlessness became apparent. A small amount of comb had been built under the floor that contained brood. The queen had clearly gone on her mating flight but, on returning, had failed to find the entrance to the hive and had rested underneath. This is not an unknown problem since the introduction of open mesh floors. Note to self for future: when you have virgin queens to be mated, always place the varroa counting insert under the hive floor.

Last month, a frame of eggs was donated to the long hive. Pleasingly, the queen raised from these eggs was now producing brood.

The last task of the day was to hive a swarm collected that morning. Due to its size, a six-frame nuc box was used. With a ramp made from a crown board placed leading up to the entrance, and covered in a sheet, some bees were shaken into the nuc, with the rest shaken onto the sheet. It's always satisfying watching the first few bees fanning the entrance, and then all the others flowing up into the hive, especially for those witnessing such a phenomenon for the first time. All the bees had cleared the sheet in the time it took to break for tea and conversation. The crown board was left in place by the entrance because this was likely to be a cast with a virgin queen. To avoid a repeat of the queen returning from a mating flight

and failing to find the entrance, the crown board will prevent her from flying underneath the hive.

Cliff Hayward, Barrwood Apiary Manager

Extractor Hire

We have two branch extractors available for hire to members, £15 for three days, payable by BACS to the usual branch account. Both extractors are stainless steel, manual type. You need to collect and deliver.

To hire the three-frame extractor, contact Liz Birchenough: membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

For the larger nine-frame extractor, contact Sarah Rapley: stweditor2@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Apiary Meetings

Saturday July 5 at 2pm: Barwood Apiary

Sunday July 13 at 11am: Hilbert Road Apiary

Saturday July 19 at 2pm: Barwood Apiary

Sunday July 27 at 11am: Hilbert Road Apiary

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/>