

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2023

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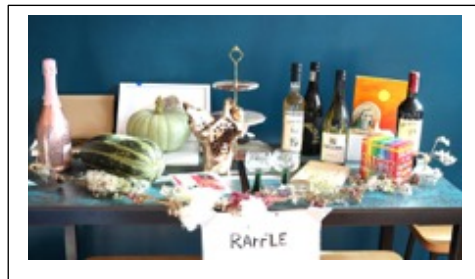


Honey Show Success

Photos by Mary Staffurth, Simon Staffurth, Paul Abbott



The Branch Honey Show in October was a busy and successful event (*writes Mary Staffurth*). For the first time it was combined with a craft fair with the aim of encouraging more visits from members of the public. In the morning the event took its usual form with beekeepers turning up with their honey, wax and other entries for the show. The doors were closed while the judge, our Branch President Paul Abbott, carefully assessed all the items and awarded places. After lunch the hall, in Hildenborough, was open to everyone. I was surprised at the constant flow of people who came through the doors, including many families with young children. There was honey for sale in the lobby, supplied by a variety of members. More than 80 jars were sold.



The craft fair was set up in a room to one side, where there was a counter with hot drinks and cakes for sale. Although there was a variety on offer most people wanted to taste honey cake. Visitors were also curious to see the many exhibits on display in the hall. Thanks are due to the committee members who worked hard to organise the event and to ensure it went smoothly on the day.

Cliff Hayward's candle-making workshop in the lobby proved very popular. The mother of the boy in the photo (top right) told me her son was so delighted with his rolled beeswax candle and so keen to light it that he enjoyed a candle-lit bath that evening.



In the Honey Show itself, the main prize winner was Tim Johnston. He secured eight first prizes in classes ranging from honey and a colour photograph to a frame of comb and a cake of moulded wax. Tim is pictured (above, left) with his wonky skep, which he entered into the beekeeping paraphernalia class. He said he began the skep on a course at the National Honey Show. It eventually took 11 months to finish and turned out to be unintentionally wonky.

The other first prize winners were: John Farrow for medium clear honey, six 1oz blocks of wax and a useful item of beekeeping paraphernalia; David Seal for two jars of clear honey in the novice class; Huw Griffiths for two jars of granulated or soft set honey in the novice class; Sue Knights for six cupcakes and six jars of set honey labelled and ready for sale; Cliff & Pauline Hayward for one bottle of sweet mead, one bottle of dry mead, two identical candles moulded, two identical candles dipped; Bob Blair for any artistic or decorative item with a bee-related theme made by the exhibitor

The cups and shields were awarded as follows:

Captain Turner Cup for the best in the clear honey classes: John Farrow

Inglis Mason Cup for the best in the set honey classes: Tim Johnston

Wilbury Cup for one cake of plain moulded wax: Tim Johnston

Bradbury Cup for the best in the mead classes: Cliff & Pauline Hayward

Jenner Rose Bowl for a honey cake: Sarah Rapley

Carter Cup for the best clear honey in the novice class: David Seal

Hart Cup for the best naturally granulated or soft set honey in the novice class: Huw Griffiths

Crowther Shield for a mounted colour photograph: Tim Johnston

Sloane Challenge Cup for the highest number of points: Tim Johnston

Asian Hornets: The French Response

The guest speaker at the Orpington beekeepers open meeting was Richard Noel, who is a commercial beekeeper in Brittany with first-hand experience of dealing with Asian Hornets en masse. Without wishing to worry anyone, he did mention another cousin of the Asian Hornet, *Vespa Orientalis*, which is currently rampaging through Rome. Luckily, this beastie prefers its protein dead, and is thriving on road kill and household waste.

Richard was at pains to point out that the Asian Hornet is not simply a threat to honey bees. It poses a genuine environmental threat as it will attack any insect and has a voracious appetite. One Asian Hornet colony can devour tens of kilograms of insects a year, which can dramatically upset the food web in the local area. Richard showed some horrifying videos of Asian Hornet attacks in his apiary. The worst part being that when this happens, you are absolutely powerless to intervene, and the Asian Hornet will decimate your colonies while you watch.

Richard also told us that Asian Hornets were highly aggressive and could deliver multiple stings which are far more painful than bee or wasp stings. So, if you find a nest, leave it to the professionals to remove. You also need to take great care if you are clearing brambles or undergrowth, as Asian Hornets will nest in this habitat.



Our only defence is to try to prevent Asian Hornet nests establishing in the first place. Timing is everything and you must try to catch emerging queens early in the spring, generally in March. At this stage the queens have a small primary nest and need to build up their strength. A wide range of DIY cocktails have been produced to lure emerging queens. One of the favourites in France is a mixture of beer, white wine (the cheap stuff), plus blackcurrant syrup (full sugar version). Richard pointed out that in the early spring, some of the emerging juveniles may not have their characteristic markings clearly developed, so may be mistaken for other species.

Dealing with Asian Hornets in the early spring is particularly important as this coincides with the spring development of honey bee colonies, when the workers are foraging for the new brood. These workers are the ones most likely to be ambushed by Asian Hornets, so honey bee colonies can become stressed and possibly collapse as they are starved by having their food supplies cut off.

There are a number of practical things the beekeeper can do to improve the odds for bee colonies. Firstly, very small apiaries of one or two hives are particularly vulnerable, as they can be easily overwhelmed by Asian Hornets. Grouping hives together in communal apiaries improves their chances of survival, and makes trap monitoring easier with a number of beekeepers working together. In addition, just as reducing the entrance size to protect against wasps is common practice in the autumn, keeping the entrances small throughout the year seems to be helpful.

It is also really important that the local community helps out with monitoring, so public awareness and assistance is essential, but given the aggressive nature of the Asian Hornet, members of the public need to be aware that they should not attempt to handle Asian Hornets themselves.

Richard had brought along a variety of traps used by his colleagues in France. One of the most effective (but not cheap) is made by Jabeprode, comprising a robust plastic box, a roughly 30cm cube containing the attractant, with two plastic funnels with one way gates to trap the Asian Hornet inside. In areas of high infestation, a box of this size can fill in a day or so. When an Asian Hornet is trapped, it gives off a pheromone which attracts others, so they in turn become trapped. The attractant used later in the summer needs to be different. Apparently Asian Hornets are very fond of cider apple vinegar which is sold in supermarkets.

Richard's observations were that the weather seemed to be significant to the levels of infestation. 2022 was a very bad year in France, whereas 2023 was not quite so bad. Richard thinks that Asian Hornets are strong enough to fly across the Channel, so if the wind is in the right direction they will land in south Kent.

In summary, the Asian Hornet has arrived and Kent is clearly on the front line. We have a couple of months to get as well prepared as possible and engage as much help as we can. It would be great if as many of you as possible could join the BBKA Asian Hornet monitoring team. On the BBKA website, in the Asian Hornet section there is a short training activity. When you successfully complete this, your membership record is annotated and the local Asian Hornet co-ordinator can call you to respond to an enquiry from a member of the public near you. This would normally be checking out a sighting of a suspect insect or advice with monitoring. Your job would be to liaise with the local co-ordinator and the NBU, you would not be expected to physically deal with Asian Hornets yourself. So far, our branch members have only found European Hornets and common wasps nests but it is almost certain that next spring, one of us will get the first positive ID in our branch area. There is no time to waste.

Liz Birchenough

AGM and Prize-Giving

The Branch Annual General Meeting will take place on Tuesday November 21 at 7.30pm at Weald Memorial Hall, Sevenoaks Weald. It will be followed by the awarding of certificates and cups to all the winners in the honey show.

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

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