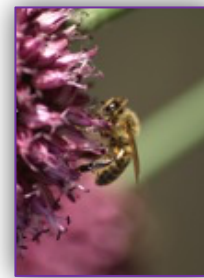


**SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS
BEEKEEPERS
BRANCH NEWSLETTER
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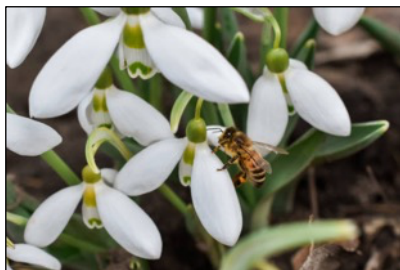


Surviving the Winter

by Branch Chairman, Cliff Hayward

With the first of the snowdrops and daffodils now coming into flower, hazel catkins much in evidence, and the day length becoming noticeably longer, spring is on its way, even if the weather remains cold, damp and generally depressing.

Getty Images



Inside the hive, the queen will be increasing her egg-laying rate. This increase in brood size will require the workers to keep an increasing area of the hive at a constant 32°C. This is a difficult time for the bees. To maintain temperatures so much above the outside temperature requires a lot of energy consumption and so lots of feeding. Keep a regular eye on the block of fondant. They might have used little to date, but it could rapidly diminish now, particularly if they have exhausted their honey stores. For many of the older bees, this extra exertion brings them to the end of their life, so it is a time when

we find many dead bees on the hive floor. Check that the entrance isn't blocked. To clear it, use a narrow stick rather than be tempted to lift the floor.

It can be a very frustrating time for the beekeeper, desperate to know how the bees are faring inside but knowing that to look would cause far too much heat to be lost from the colony. Instead, rely on observing the hive entrance. Seeing nothing happening is rather inconclusive. (In the past I've worried about bees from one hive not flying on nice days when the others were active only to discover it was the strongest colony of all at the first inspection in late March.) However, seeing pollen being brought in is normally a sign that the queen is laying well. It's likely to be the pollen sources that stimulate the queen to increase her laying rate.

February is also your last chance to ensure all stored equipment from last year is cleaned and sterilised because once the beekeeping season starts, there won't be time. Also, ensure you have that extra brood or nuc box ready for when they start to swarm.

As for planning ahead for the season, may I recommend you attend the Westerham Branch talk on 25th February: 'Varroa Tolerant Breeding - The story so far' by their apiary manager, Steve McGrath. Details are on their website. For newer beekeepers, book yourself onto our own Basic Beekeeping course.

Basic Beekeeping Course

This course is for anyone who has taken part in our Introduction to Beekeeping course and for those who have started keeping bees but would like to better understand the subject and be prepared for the season ahead. It will be a series of five fortnightly evening indoor sessions with numbers limited to 10, to ensure all participants have time to ask their own personal questions and full discussions can take place during the evening. The indoor sessions will take place at Hildenborough Community Hall on Wednesday evenings from 7.30pm until 9.30pm, on 11th and 25th March, 8th and 22nd April and 6th May.

Topics covered will include bee biology, planning for the year, health and disease, hive locations and types, honey harvest and preparing for winter. We will also look at how standard beekeeping practice will need to change should Yellow-legged Hornet become established.

Cost £75. Please book through Liz Birchenough at membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

New Lease of Life for the Bee Shed



All is quiet at Hilbert Road. The bees are flying on warm days but otherwise there is little bee action. We continue to heft and check stores and fondant is ready for any colonies that may need topping up. We are taking advantage of the closed season and making plans for this year.

We currently have 10 colonies which all appear to be thriving at the moment though many losses occur in the early spring when queens fail to start laying or weak colonies collapse.

We plan to divide the colonies into two groups this season. Four of the most prolific will be set up as honey producers and will be disturbed as little as possible. Three will be the training colonies where inspections will be carried out by our trainee beekeepers at the apiary meetings. The remaining three colonies are destined to move to other apiaries, assuming they are strong coming out of winter. In addition, Martin and I are working on the bee shed, cleaning and making repairs so that it can be brought back into service.

We look forward to welcoming everyone back at the end of March when apiary meetings are set to be reinstated.

Finally, I am going on a little adventure and will not be around from 19th February until 20th May. I will have access to the WhatsApp group and am happy to answer any questions our new beekeepers may have. Otherwise, the apiary will be left in the capable hands of Liz Seal, Martin Barrett and Paddy Green.

Sue Knights, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager.

Photos of the bee shed by Sue Knights



Hands-on Apiary Meetings

Meetings at our two branch apiaries will resume at the end of February. They normally take place fortnightly: at Barrwood on Saturday afternoons and at Hilbert Road on Sunday mornings. Dates will be published on the website and in the newsletter. Occasionally dates have to be changed. Martin Barrett maintains a WhatsApp group for the apiaries so that last minute changes can be publicised.

Managing Swarm Behaviour

The topic for our March indoor meeting is: 'Don't be caught out by your bees swarming'. Cliff Hayward will explain different methods of trying to ensure you don't lose half your bees to the high trees. He will give tips on management methods that will allow you to decide when they should prepare to swarm. The date of the meeting has not yet been confirmed.

Don't forget to check our website for all the latest information: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>

Send photos or articles for the newsletter to: newsletter@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk