

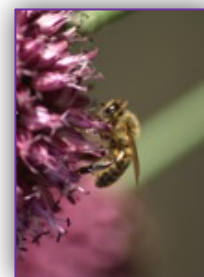
SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

MARCH 2026

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Branch website: www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk



Living in Style at Hilbert Road



A lot of hard work has been taking place at the club apiary in Hilbert Road to restore the beehouse to use. Sue Knights and Martin Barrett have devoted much time to developing the apiary. The bee shed itself has been there for many years but for as long as many can remember it has been used simply for storage. Now it is ready to be occupied by colonies of bees. The hive entrances are on the outside of the shed and beekeepers will inspect the bees standing on the inside, wearing full beekeeping equipment of course. Beehouses were traditionally used in the Alpine regions of Europe. Although they are no longer as

popular I have seen examples when I have been skiing in Austria and Switzerland. If any of our long-standing members from the days when Tunbridge Wells was a separate beekeeping association remember the beehouse in use, please let me know.

This project at Hilbert Road adds to the variety of hives being used, including different types of long hive. Another large shed on site provides plenty of storage space as well as room to enjoy tea and coffee with the help of Martin's very large portable battery, which supplies power for a light among other things.

Mary Staffurth

Photos: The beehouse with the entrances visible at the base and Sue Knights on the inside

Go Gently into the Hives

by Branch Chairman, Cliff Hayward



Writing this after the first two consecutive days of sunshine it seems that spring is finally here. After so many dull, wet days it is such a relief. Also, I saw my first bumblebee although I know there have been reports of earlier ones. I guess it's time to take the mouse-guards off. They can, unfortunately, knock pollen off the legs of the returning bees but be mindful, if it turns cold again, they may need to go back on. Keep a close eye on the fondant store. A couple of warm days may have the bees out foraging but nectar is still in short supply, and they will still only be flying for a short time. The need for more food, however, is increasing as the queen's egg-laying rate increases.

March is generally considered the beginning of the beekeeping season, with the first inspection taking place once the temperature gets to a sustained 15°C. Don't be tempted to look too early, just observe at the entrance. Pollen being brought in and no signs of dysentery over the front of the hive generally mean all is well inside. On your first inspection don't keep the bees uncovered for very long. Just look for brood in the centre and some stores. Otherwise at your second inspection you may find signs of chilled brood: black, dead larvae at the edge of the brood nest where the workers have been unable to keep the temperature high enough for development.

Thinking about swarming before most of us have considered inspecting our colonies may seem strange but the crowded conditions forced by long periods in the hive is a principal trigger for swarm preparations. Would you be prepared if you found queen cells on your first inspection? Last year drones appeared very early on and there were many reports of early swarms.

Managing Swarm Behaviour

Swarming is the topic for our March indoor meeting at 7.30pm on **Wednesday 4th March** at Weald Memorial Hall. Branch chairman Cliff Hayward will explain different techniques to ensure you don't lose half your bees. He will also go through some management methods that will allow you to control the timing of swarming behaviour.

Branch honey from the summer 2025 harvest will be available for sale.

Basic Beekeeping Course

This course will take place at Hildenborough Community Hall on Wednesday evenings from 7.30pm until 9.30pm, on March 11th and 25th, April 8th and 22nd and May 6th. Topics 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 the Yellow-legged Hornet become established. Cost £75. Please book through Liz Birchenough at membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk



Swarm Request List

For those who have an empty hive or have lost bees please send your name, address, and phone number (preferably mobile) to: swarms@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Photo by John Farrow

Apiary Meetings

Meetings at the club apiaries in Tunbridge Wells and Hildenborough begin this month. At this time of year Hilbert Road meetings start at 11.30 as the apiary is in woodland and can be a bit chilly until the sun is overhead. The time will switch to 11am as the season progresses.

Sue Knights is the Hilbert Road Apiary manager: hilbertapiary@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Cliff Hayward is the Barrwood Apiary manager: chairman@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Sunday March 18 at Hilbert Road Apiary at 11.30am: gardening / tidy up / equipment check

Saturday March 21 at Barrwood Apiary at 2pm: gardening / tidy up / equipment check

Sunday March 29 at Hilbert Road Apiary at 11.30am: first planned inspection

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