

**SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS
BEEKEEPERS
BRANCH NEWSLETTER
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The Thrill of Opening Up

Towards the end of March, we had a sleet storm with very high cold winds followed by frost overnight. It seems that after a couple of weeks of sunshine and mild weather we have returned to winter. This is not unusual at this time of year but reminds us that we cannot congratulate ourselves on having got our bees successfully through the winter just yet. With the increase in the queen's egg-laying rate, the danger is that the workers will not be able to keep all the brood warm.

We have just had our first inspection at Barrwood. It's always exciting to open a hive, especially when it's the first time that year. We had mixed results. Three colonies looked strong with a good brood pattern although in one, there were no young larvae. I was particularly pleased that the long hive was very active, as last winter its colony perished. Being satisfied that they had enough stores, we quickly closed them up, and attention was turned to the possible reasons for the two failed colonies.

Interestingly, one colony had a very small cluster of bees remaining but there had clearly been no brood-raising for some time. However, a few frames did have an outer ring of sealed brood, although this was dead. It can be very difficult to work out why a colony does not survive, although this ring of brood suggests that the queen had produced a large amount of brood but, with temperatures cooling, the workers were unable to keep it warm enough, hence the ring of dead pupae. The requirement to feed such a large brood would have shortened the life expectancy of many of the workers. Winter bees survive for about six months, largely by doing little. Summer workers, being more active, live only up to six weeks. It is likely that the winter bees worked themselves to an early death. Many beekeepers report that their best, most vigorous colony dies out over winter. Why? It comes down to adaptation. With a history of imported queens, many from Mediterranean climates, with a short winter, colonies can be unsuited to our climate. It was a pity that the large amount of stores remaining in this hive showed signs of fermentation, because it meant we couldn't extract the honey.

Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman



Honey Pots of Old

Are you interested in giving some old honey pots a good home? Tim Johnston has been approached by someone in Ightham whose father kept bees. She has discovered more than a dozen old honey pots that she believes were used to store honey before glass jars became the norm. It is not clear how the pots were sealed, but Tim assumes it might have involved waxed cloth and string! She doesn't want any money, just a good home for the jars.

If you are interested contact Tim: secretary@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Tunbridge Wells Climate Fair

The branch will have a stall at the Tunbridge Wells Climate and Nature Fair in Calverley Gardens on Sunday 3rd May (10am to 5pm). There will be a number of events, so why not come along and support us in our gazebo? There will be lots of stalls and talks, so there should be something of interest for everyone.

Liz Birchenough

Magnifying Bees

We have been offered a wonderful opportunity by Tonbridge School of exploring bee morphology using a scanning electron microscope (SEM) that will be at the school for four weeks this summer. The SEM produces rapid, high-resolution, three-dimensional images at magnifications of several thousand times. Insects, in particular, image exceptionally well under the SEM and the school has invited us to a session using this equipment.

If you are interested in exploring the morphology of workers, drones and queens, or perhaps varroa mites, crystallised honey, hive structures at the microscale, or any predators and parasites of bees then sign up for this event. Pollen samples will also be fascinating to view.

The branch will be providing samples to the school in advance of the meeting to allow preparation ready for us to study. It will be on Sunday 7 June at 2pm. 30 places are available and there is no fee. To reserve your place email Tim Johnston: secretary@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Getting Ready for Swarm Season

This was our first talk this year, and it was great to see so many people attending, especially several new members just starting out with beekeeping. Cliff Hayward talked us through some basic facts about swarming. I know it is only March, but the top tip is **be prepared**. To start with, Cliff went through how and why a swarm develops. He showed pictures to give some clues as to how to spot the difference between normal queen cells, supersedure and emergency queen cells, and explained how each case arises. He also showed a timeline of swarm development to explain why regular inspections are so important in spring and early summer. Cliff was at pains to point out that the practice of queen cell removal serves no useful purpose and will not prevent swarming. In fact, it can trigger multiple cast swarms to develop.

Cliff then went through the basic principles of separating the three main protagonists, the existing queen, flying workers, and brood (including the new queen cell) with juvenile bees. Traditionally, the brood and juvenile bees are separated from the other groups. Cliff demonstrated two of the most common techniques: Pagden and Demaree. Both have their advantages and disadvantages, it is really down to personal choice but you need your spare parts ready to go quickly as there will not be enough time to order an extra brood box and frames. Of course, you now have two colonies, so Cliff did touch briefly on reuniting colonies at the end of the season, or if you prefer, one of the colonies could be re-homed with another beekeeper. All in all, a very helpful and timely presentation.

Liz Birchenough



Swarm Request List

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

Apiary Meetings

Hilbert Road Apiary on Sunday 12 April at 11.30am

Barrwood Apiary on Saturday 18 April at 2pm

Hilbert Road Apiary on Sunday 26 April at 11.30am

Wednesday 29th April at 7.30pm, Weald Memorial Hall – Diseases of Honey Bees talk

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/>