

KENT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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Swarming - Minimising the Risk



On 17th April, a bright sunny morning, I picked up this swarm. Could this be the first swarm of the season? Probably not, but as swarming will start in earnest in May, it prompted me to suggest a few tips to minimise the risk of losing half your colony and half your honey crop:

- Place new frames and foundation either side of the brood nest to allow the queen to increase her nest size. Congestion can cause swarming. If necessary remove outside frames, but ensure enough food and pollen remains.
- If you have a weak colony and a very strong colony, moving two to three frames of brood from the strong colony to the weak one will reduce the tendency of the strong one to swarm. It also has the added benefit of increasing honey production of both colonies.
- If there is oil seed rape nearby the bees will be so concentrated on foraging this crop that they will not be inclined to swarm but be prepared to add supers quite frequently. However, be aware that some oil seed rape does not produce any nectar.

- Consider putting one or more 'bait hives' in the apiary to catch swarms. A nucleus box with some old used comb is ideal, with maybe the addition of lemon grass oil. Position it reasonably high up and as far away from your hives as is practical.
- Finally, large numbers of drone brood can be an indicator that the colony is contemplating swarming. If there is a large presence of hatched drones this may be a sign you are too late!!

John Farrow

A Chilly Start at Barrwood

With such an unseasonably warm February and March, and despite the temperature being on the cool side, it was decided to have a quick inspection at our first April meeting to ensure there were enough stores and room to lay. The first hive still had fondant remaining from the last inspection and one hive was given additional feed. All colonies had space.

In many of the hives young larvae were seen but no eggs. This break in egg laying is likely due to the workers not being able to bring in fresh forage, so starving the queen to prevent them running out of stores. There are alternative reasons for not seeing eggs, but as this is the most positive scenario I would like to believe this one.

We replaced the WBC stand that hive number 3 had been sitting on. The result was that the open mesh floor did not really do its job of allowing varroa mites to fall through and not get back, so this hive stand was replaced by some breeze blocks to raise it further off the ground.

Hive number 2, an old Dartington, was also placed on breeze block legs, so the hive could be removed and its condition inspected, with the thought of bringing it back into service. As expected the floor has rotted somewhat, but as it would need to be converted to an open mesh floor, this is of little consequence; so an ongoing project for the future!

The weather for the April 27th meeting was worse than on the 13th, with a cold wind and air temperature of only 10 degrees. Any inspection would have chilled the brood so we spent some useful time cleaning excess wax and propolis from frames. We added a super to all the hives to give them some more room for when the weather improves and they can start foraging again. We still hope to raise some queens during May.

Cliff Hayward

Hamid Habibi

It is with great sadness that we report the recent passing of Mr Hamid Habibi following a short illness. Hamid had been a member of the branch for several years with an apiary near Maidstone.

Beekeeping Survey

The COLOSS monitoring initiative, which collects data about winter losses, is keen to gather more figures from the Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells area. The survey co-ordinator for England, Dr Anthony Williams has written this open letter to all beekeepers:

“In the last decade, elevated losses of western honey bee colonies have been observed, mainly in Europe and North America, but the underlying causes still remain unclear. In 2008, European and USA honey bee experts formed a network "COLOSS" realising that efforts by individual countries to identify the drivers of losses were unlikely to succeed, given the current consensus that causes are complex and can be different between regions and between the years. Now more than 1000 scientists are working together in this network in specific working groups.

The epidemiological working group have developed a standardised questionnaire to identify the underlying causal factors of losses and provide beekeepers sustainable management strategies.

We now invite you to fill in the questionnaire for 2019. This will enable us to compare your answers with other beekeepers. With your data we can estimate the relative risk of colony losses for beekeeper decisions such as Varroa treatment, migration of colonies and comb replacement. We also aim to identify differences in relative mortality risk between regions. This will enable follow up research projects in specific regions.”

The survey can be accessed through the following link <https://www.bee-survey.com/index.php/368949>

Diary Dates

Saturday 4 May at 2pm: Hilbert Road Apiary meeting

Saturday 11 May at 2pm: Barrwood Apiary meeting

Saturday 18 May at 2pm: Hilbert Road Apiary meeting

Saturday 25 May at 2pm: Barrwood Apiary meeting

Check the website for changes to meetings: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/meetings-and-events/>

Learn More on the Asian Hornet threat

The Weald branch of Kent Beekeepers Association is holding a talk on the Asian Hornet entitled Practical Advice from France. Robert Moon is a professional pest controller and beekeeper living in France. In 2018 he removed more than 100 Asian Hornets nests. Robert will talk about his pest control experience of Asian Hornets but also give his view as a beekeeper. It will be on Saturday 1 June 2019, 14:00 – 16:00 at Lenham Community Centre. Tickets must be booked in advance. See the Weald branch website for details:

<http://www.wealdbeekeepers.com>

Please send any articles or photos for the newsletter to Mary Staffurth: marystaffurth@yahoo.com