

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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Editor: Mary Staffurth

Tel: 01732 462931 or e-mail: marystaffurth@yahoo.com

Branch website: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>



Mice Nests and Cobwebs Targeted in Hilbert Road Clean-up



On Sunday January 12, the young and young at heart gathered at the Hilbert Road Apiary to start sprucing up the area and give the place a much-needed clean. A workplace 'Five S' approach (Sort, Set in order, Shine, Standardise and Sustain) was certainly needed. The enthusiastic group met at 10am and set to work cleaning out the sheds and making an inventory of all they contained. In fact, despite everyone's heroic efforts, we were only able to clean out the main shed. It was not a job for the faint hearted! Spiders had set up home in every corner of every cupboard. Mice had busied themselves building nests behind the cupboards – even helping themselves to the smoker fuel cartridges and paper to help line their nests.

We were lucky that the weather was on our side. The earlier showers had cleared and we were able to move all the considerable amount of equipment outside. The tasks of cleaning items and of discarding those well beyond their useable life began in earnest, though I must say sentiment sometimes got the better of us. It was then a matter of cataloguing before returning the items to storage. While some people were dealing with the equipment, others cleaned the cupboards and the shed and rearranged the storage facilities to make the best use of space. With the spiders, cobwebs, mice nests and general dirt accumulated over the years removed it was time to bring everything back into the shed. We started the process of logical storage of like-for-like equipment, setting up ample space to access boxes, frames, foundation, tools and cleaning items.



It was amazing how quickly time went by and throughout the morning everyone remained positive, there was plenty of laughter and all contributed to the event. People gave extra support by taking home rubbish for recycling and offering to obtain more shelving for the cupboards, mend broken items, and buy cleaning solutions and cleaning equipment.

It would be good if we could label the cupboards so we can complete and then sustain the improvements we have made. There is still much to do but with the determination, commitment and enthusiasm of the Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Beekeeping Association members I am sure we can achieve our goals.

Thank you and see you next time.

Anne Nicholls

Photos by Anne Nicholls

Persuading Your Bees to Stay Put

At our January Branch meeting John Hendrie gave a talk on the Demaree method of swarm control and Bailey comb change. Liz Birchenough reports:

'Twas a dark and stormy night..... and more than 30 members braved the weather to hear John Hendrie talk us through an important refresher on managing our colonies. It may seem a bit early to be thinking about swarm control techniques, but Spring will be upon us very soon, so "be prepared".

John reminded us all that there were many different methods of swarm control, each with merits and disadvantages. His first tip was that it helps to stick to one method because if you try several different approaches, you are likely to get confused halfway through. All methods of swarm control rely on the fact that a colony needs a queen, brood, nursery bees and flying bees. By manipulating these groups, you can inhibit or override swarming behaviour. With all swarm control techniques, success relies on the beekeeper spotting the symptoms of a potential swarm early enough, and acting promptly.



The Demaree method relies on separating the colony vertically. This can be an advantage for those with limited apiary space although, during the process, you can have quite a tall stack to manage. Possibly a time to phone a friend! There is also a variation of the Demaree method which can be used when the beekeeper cannot identify the queen, very helpful if your queen is not marked or is a bit shy. John demonstrated the sequence using a dummy hive with an image of bees attached to the frames, which was very helpful to get a picture in your mind of what you would need to look for in your apiary.

John in mid-demonstration. Picture by Liz Birchenough.

The second technique John demonstrated was the Bailey comb change. This is a method of removing old or dirty frames from a live colony without too much disturbance. John reminded us that we should be changing brood frames every two to three seasons. The important piece of kit is a small eke with an entrance which should be placed between the original and new brood boxes. The original low level entrance at floor level needs to be temporarily closed off, so all the flying bees come through the temporary central entrance. Again, it is important to be sure that the queen and the brood are in the correct section of the hive. The worker bees can move throughout the hives, but you do need to take care that drones are released from the closed part. The whole process takes about three weeks, so you will need to briefly release the closed entrance to let any trapped drones out of the brood box.

John also reminded us that there is a variation on the Bailey technique that can be very helpful if you have a weak colony, possibly with Nosema infections. Clean comb and feeding can be enough to help your colony recover. The fundamental difference here is that with a weak colony you want to help them as much as possible. The new comb you provide should be already drawn, and you need to feed with sugar syrup. John did recommend using a small contact feeder rather than the large tray type as this is easier for a weak colony to access.

Why Not Take a Beekeeping Exam?

Part Two of John's talk was about the beekeeping assessment, as Chris Murphy explains.

John ran through the competencies and some sample questions that would be expected of you in the BBKA Basic Assessment. He called on members to consider applying for the assessment as, after four members passed the exam in 2018, no-one from our Branch took the test last year.

If you would like to apply please let Cliff Hayward know so that potential students can talk to each other, share information and practise together. Apiary meetings can then be tailored for specific parts of the assessment.

Swarm Requests

Although it is only February the Swarm Request list for 2020 has already been started. If you want to add your name please send an email with your name, address, landline and mobile numbers to John Farrow at stweditor@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

READ ON – there's a Page 3 this month.....

Beginners Course

The course on February 23 is fully booked, but Liz Birchenough has arranged two additional dates on March 15 and March 29. If you are interested please email Liz: membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Nucs with Queens

One of our members in the Southborough area has a couple of nucs available with marked and mated 2019 queens. These will be ready for re-homing in the spring. If you would like to buy one of these nucs, please contact David on 07825 276060.

Diary Dates

Sunday February 16 at Hilbert Road Apiary at 10am: Continuing to prepare the apiary for the beekeeping season with the apiary manager, Vic Webb.

Wednesday February 19 at Weald Memorial Hall at 7.30pm: Steve Riley of Westerham Branch will talk about his experience of queen trapping for varroa control without having to use chemicals.

Liz Birchenough will have Branch honey for sale at this meeting: £5 for 12oz jars and £6.50 for 16oz jars (correct cash please).

On the Web

Vic Webb is recommending a US website, Keeping Backyard Bees, which has various articles on subjects such as how to learn about your bees by listening and watching at the hive entrance, as well as how to read a frame.
<https://www.keepingbackyardbees.com>

Bees on Tap



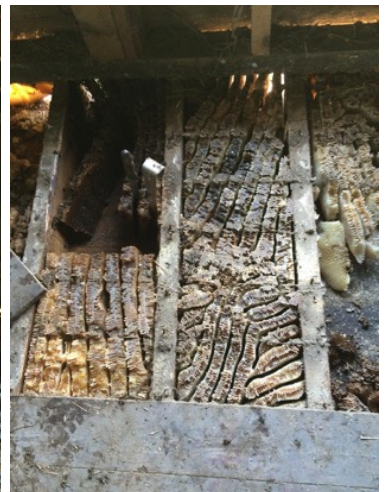
A farmer friend asked me if I would collect some bees he had found. He sent me this photo of a colony that had made its home in his water meter box. I advised him to close it up and leave them there until the Spring. They are not causing any bother and it will be better to remove them when the weather warms up.

Simon Staffurth

Honey in the Rafters

Vic Webb recalls collecting bees from a huge section of barn in 2016.

We were called out to collect a swarm and encountered three colonies under a 27 feet section of flooring boards upstairs in a barn, which was due to be demolished. I took the bees and Peter Hutton took the honey.



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Send your photos and other items for the newsletter to marystaffurth@yahoo.com