

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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Trapping Queens to Control Varroa

At our February meeting, Steve Riley gave us a fascinating talk on controlling varroa without chemicals. To support what he said he used research conducted by Ralph Büchler, and the research project that has been carried out by Westerham Beekeepers on 28 colonies since 2018.

To start with, an increasing number of varroa tolerant *Apis Mellifera* have been identified across Europe and the rest of the world. This is good news as we all know that the various miticides have not solved the varroa issue and it has been suggested that the current problems may have been heavily influenced by the very use of these chemicals.

So what is the long term solution and why are some hives resistant to the effects of varroa? Resistance has been attributed to:

1. Hygienic behaviours in bees
2. Resistance to viruses e.g. deformed wing
3. Genetic evolution of bees
4. Natural selection
5. Brood breaks

Each of these could be the basis of a lecture in themselves. Steve said we could start to observe for hygienic behaviours and breed from these bees. He then focused on brood breaks as a simple system we could use. The main method is a queen trap. Westerham Beekeepers have been successfully using homemade queen traps for two years now. From July onwards, for 36 days, the queen is confined to one frame, where she lays all her eggs but nurse bees can enter the cage to tend the brood. Varroa also enter the trapped frame. Once the brood is capped over the frame is removed along with the mites. The downside is losing 36 days worth of brood, the upside is the beekeepers have not had to use chemicals for varroa as a result and honey production has gone up! They have also used shook swarms as a method for brood breaks but better results have been found with using queen traps.



Steve kindly left us two queen traps which he made for £10 each. There are instructions on the Westerham Beekeepers website, just search for 'Westerham beekeepers treatment free methods'. It was a fantastic evening of both research and pragmatic advice. If you want to move away from using chemicals, I'd strongly advise giving it a go, I know I will. In addition, if you want to see a video of Ralph Büchler giving even more information, he gave a talk at the National Honey Show. You can see this by simply going to YouTube and searching for 'Varroa Resistance Characters and Selection Protocols (Part 1 of 4) Ralph Büchler'.

Chris Murphy

This metal queen frame trap costs £42 at bee-equipment.co.uk

You can also go to our website for more details about the talk and links to the Westerham research:

<http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/Natural-Beekeeping-QueenFrameTrapping.pdf>

Flying the Flag for Bees at Hever Castle

Hever Castle regularly arranges family events to coincide with school holidays. This year we were invited to take part in the Living with Nature event with wildlife charities. Sadly, the weather was against us, so attendance was lower than originally predicted, but nonetheless we did have some interesting conversations about the pressure on bees in the environment, where to get real honey, and how to get started keeping bees. We may even get a few more attendees at our Introduction to Beekeeping course.

Due to the time of year, it was not appropriate to take an observation hive, so we had to improvise a bit with how we engaged with the visitors. Luckily, we were right next to the orchard where there are a couple of WBC hives, so we could use this as a conversation starter.

We also used it as an opportunity to spread the word about the Asian Hornet, especially amongst the keen walkers and gardeners.

Liz Birchenough

Welcoming New Beekeepers

Sunday 23rd February was the first Introduction to Beekeeping training day held in the branch this year. A varied group of potential beekeepers met at Weald Memorial Hall for a carefully designed course, aiming to provide sufficient information to allow everyone to make an informed choice about their next steps.



After introductions and the welcome, we started with an outline of bee biology, which led into a year in the life of the beekeeper. Here we tried to ensure everyone understood how beekeepers responded to the natural behaviour of the bees during the season, with an idea of the time commitment this would entail, and common problems such as dealing with swarming and infestations of varroa. Following this, we looked at the various common types of hive, with the different benefits of each one.

The next section was called 'getting started'. We discussed bee suits, ancillary equipment, locating a hive and, of course, managing potential hazards. In addition, we talked about what sort of budget could be expected and how to acquire your first colony.

In the summary session, we discussed next steps - visiting the branch apiaries to practise handling bees under supervision, and other helpful sources of information. We look forward to our new members becoming skilled and successful beekeepers over the next few years.

The course was presented by Cliff Hayward, Sue Knights and Liz Birchenough. Due to very high demand, the course will be repeated twice in March. The session on 15th March is already fully booked, but there are a couple of places available for the course on 29th March.

Liz Birchenough

Apiary Sites Available

Claire, in Borough Green, has contacted the branch to offer space for a beekeeper to site their hives. Please contact her on 07946 344715 if you are interested.

Christian Santo writes: I have recently bought a farmhouse that comes with around 40 acres of land in Hildenborough. I am really keen for someone to place some hives on my land. It is all grass; it is used for sheep in the winter and hay in the summer and there are a number of quieter areas where the hives could go. Email: santochristian@hotmail.com

Diary Dates

Saturday March 14 at 2pm at Barrwood Apiary: First meeting at the club apiary to prepare for the coming season with Cliff Hayward, Apiary Manager.

Wednesday March 18 at 7.30pm at Weald Memorial Hall: Dr Hauke Koch, a biologist from the research department at Kew Gardens, will talk about the fascinating diversity of plant chemicals in pollen and nectar. He will also tell us about Kew's research into how bees learn to recognise which may be harmful and which are beneficial.

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

Saturday March 28 at 2pm at Barrwood Apiary with Cliff Hayward, Apiary Manager.

Keep up to date by going to our website: <http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/>

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