

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER

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Coronavirus: Branch Activities Cancelled

The committee has taken the difficult decision to cancel all indoor meetings and access to the branch apiaries until further notice. Although the apiaries are outdoors, it was felt that it would be difficult to maintain a suitable separation between beekeepers, especially where less experienced beekeepers may need guidance and assistance. Also, there is no running water so hand washing is difficult. Access to the branch apiaries will be restricted to a small team of experienced beekeepers with the specific task of looking after the bees during the next few months. The advice from BBKA is that because bees are livestock, even in the event of more restrictions on movement, beekeepers with live colonies will be able to visit their own apiaries.

The BBKA 2020 Spring Convention - scheduled to take place at Harper Adams University 3-5 April - has been cancelled. A full refund will be made for all bookings made via the BBKA.

For more details of the BBKA's response to Covid-19 visit our website:

<http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Covid-19-BBKA-Recommendations.pdf>

The National Bee Unit is also providing helpful advice via Beebase. To sign up to Beebase go to: www.nationalbeeunit.com

Make Your Own Queen Frame Trap

Whilst under 'stay at home' constraints and when the weather was too cold to venture out, I made four of the Queen Frame Traps that Steve Riley detailed during his talk to our branch at our February meeting (*writes John Farrow*). So, if you are also looking for something to do apart from gardening or painting here is a list of items and their costs.

- 1 – 2,400mm x 21mm x 12mm pine wood strip from Wickes£4.51 (enough to make 2 frames)
- Box of 200 x 12mm screws from Wickes.....£3.59 (current trading constraints mean Wickes now only operates a click & collect policy so you must order online first).
- Plastic Queen Excluder from Bee Equipment, Canterbury£4.00 + carriage
- On Ebay 900mm Piano Hinges brass or nickel plated £5.00 + £3.99 postage
- I used the screws and a staple gun to fix the queen excluder to each frame.
- The piano hinge means the two frames are narrower at the bottom, requiring removal of one of the bottom bars.
- I found Velcro did not give a tight enough seal to prevent a Houdini queen from escaping, so I used wire to clamp the top of the frames together, as shown in these photos:



For construction details click on: <http://westerham.kbka.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/QFT-instructions.pdf>

Training New Beekeepers

As a result of the response to our first training day, we realised we needed to run more events. We went ahead with our second meeting at Weald Memorial Hall on 15th March, before movement was restricted by Covid-19. The training was delivered by Liz Birchenough and Sue Knights, with huge assistance from David and Elizabeth Seal, who helped set out the room, wiped over all the tables, and kept us supplied with tea and coffee. As experienced beekeepers themselves, they also were able to provide the delegates with support and encouragement. It was great to see two junior members among the class, who were both remarkably well informed and had clearly done their homework - some excellent beekeepers in the making! We have been delighted with the positive feedback from the delegates, and hope to see them become active members of the branch.

Liz Birchenough

Preparing for the Season at Barrwood

It seems a world away now, when on 14th March, a dozen of us convened for the first Barrwood meeting of the year to cut brambles, tidy the site of fallen branches and to clean and sterilise equipment, ready for the coming season. Within days, the Government had recommended that such social gatherings should not take place.

Even though all foreseeable Barrwood meetings were being cancelled, the first inspection of the year did take place. Following guidelines from the BBKA, Sue Knights and I met on Friday 28th, to make the most of the warm weather because a cold North wind was forecast for the Saturday. Sue started in the middle and worked towards the road while I began nearest the shed and worked towards the middle. We therefore maintained our social distancing as far as practical. Pauline drifted in between us to take notes, pass on questions and fetch equipment.

Most colonies, following the period of good weather, were looking strong and had been collecting stores. Floors were changed to remove the build-up of debris from the Winter. Those on double brood were reduced to single brood to remove the oldest frames. One colony needs to be closely watched because there was a small amount of drone brood. Either this is a sign that it intends to swarm early, or the queen is becoming a drone layer. Rather too few drones to be confident of a diagnosis at present, but maybe a warning to all that swarming may come quite early this year. However, with most of us not being able to work, there seems little excuse for not being prepared.

Cliff Hayward

Asian Hornet Threat

By Vanessa Jones

The BBKA has asked every branch to appoint a coordinator (I am the coordinator for Sevenoaks) to act as a point of contact for Asian Hornet sightings. So far, I am a team of one so volunteers are needed to assist with local requests for help. Please let me know if you would be interested in becoming part of the team.

All beekeepers are encouraged to keep an eye out for Asian Hornets in their apiaries. It is important for us all to register on BeeBase www.nationalbeeunit.com and to ensure our contact and apiary details are up to date. There is a facility to record if you are using Asian Hornet monitoring at your apiary. If an email address is included this makes it super easy for individuals to receive alerts from the NBU when Asian Hornets reach our area.

It is essential that all Beekeepers can identify Asian Hornets: the ID sheet, poster and postcard can be downloaded from BeeBase or ordered from the NBU office: nbu@apha.gov.uk

A word on monitoring and trapping: monitoring traps can be used in the Spring. A fact sheet and a YouTube video on how to make an Asian Hornet monitoring trap are available on the Asian Hornet pages of BeeBase. If you are monitoring, record your monitoring activity on BeeBase by editing your apiary records. It is illegal to trap and release an Asian Hornet so it is important to check traps very regularly and be in a position to report and respond if one is trapped.

Under the BBKA system the public will be able to search for a local Association for help following a suspected Asian Hornet sighting. Team members from local Associations can then assist with identification and obtaining a specimen and photograph. These should then be sent by email to alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk or via the Asian Hornet Watch app.

If you think you see an Asian Hornet, report it immediately because early sightings are our best line of defence. Early detection to allow the National Bee Unit to intervene and prevent the establishment of nests on a localised basis is the plan. Our best chance is to spot the queens coming out of hibernation so April will be a busy month. Please do not hesitate to call if you think you have spotted an Asian Hornet and need a second pair of eyes.

Additional volunteers are much needed. I am contactable on 07799 383996 or email vanessapjones@btinternet.com
See more our website:

<http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Asian-Hornet-Update-200304.pdf>

Second Chance for WBCs



I am a big fan of WBCs and took pity on the pile that was rotting at Barrwood. I brought them home and dried the timber out over the winter. I managed to salvage a whole hive's worth of lifts, roof and floor and after a few coats of paint, some repairs and filler, it looks as good as new. It will make a nice addition to the apiary this year.

Sarah Rapley

Editor's note:

Please send photos and news about your own bees to me for the next newsletter so that we can keep in touch through our beekeeping activities. Email: marystaffurth@yahoo.com