

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER MAY 2020

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Beginning the Beekeeping Season

by Peter Hutton

The change in weather has had a profound impact on colony development. Throughout March and April honey bees have, of necessity, been collecting water as well as nectar and pollen. Drones are appearing and, within a fortnight, many will be emerging from pupation and will be fertile.

If you are not already inspecting your bees, how will you know when to act to prevent swarming? Loss of a swarm is loss of a honey crop and swarms can be a nuisance to the public. Towards the end of April, a Tonbridge householder had to arrange for a swarm to be removed from behind the weatherboarding of his house, with scaffolding that will cost as much as £1,500.

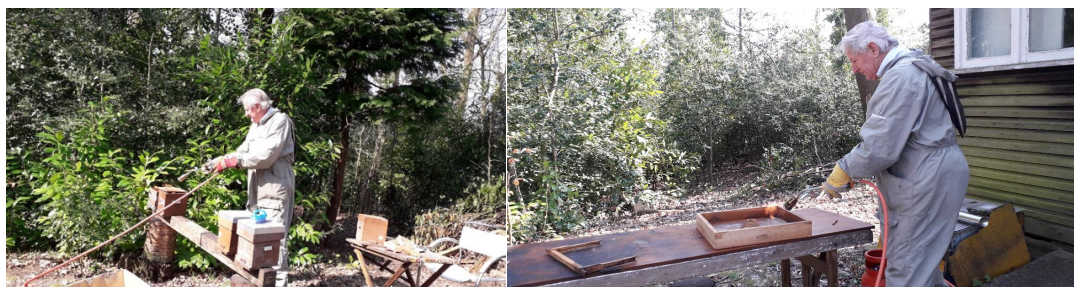
If you are a new beekeeper in your first or second year, and need a mentor, I suggest you ask our membership secretary, Liz Birchenough, to put you in touch with suitable beekeeper. I would recommend using Zoom to communicate.

For those of you waiting for a swarm I suggest buying swarm lures as well as setting up bait hives. A recently discarded brood comb is also a good lure to have in your hive.

Remember May is the month when the most foundation will be drawn. Use Manley frames with drone foundation in your supers because honey extracts better from the larger cells. Make sure your queen has more than sufficient empty cells in which to lay eggs: too few and the bees will swarm for sure.

If your workers build queen cells, do not chop out queen cups but scratch an X on top of the frames so you know quickly which ones to look at when in a hurry. If you operate two brood boxes then queen cells will be drawn along the underside of the upper brood frames, just pivot the upper box upward to look along the frame bottoms.

Sprucing up Hilbert Road



It was a glorious, if quiet day at the end of March when Vic Webb and Tania Kennedy met at a safe distance to begin scraping and flaming some of the recently audited equipment at Hilbert Road. Vic ably manned the flame thrower whilst novice Tania scraped and wire-brushed the queen rearing boxes, ensuring the equipment was sterilised and ready for the new season. It is important to clean equipment thoroughly to minimise the potential of disease transfer from one season to the next - it's a shame it's not as easy to kill and prevent the transfer of coronavirus.

Tania Kennedy

In April, I went through the Hilbert Road colonies, which are strong, and did not find queen cells. I have marked three out of six queens. Two supers have been put on each with the help of Tania. I collected my first swarm on 23rd April but the householder wanted to keep it and I think that he will now join our branch.

Vic Webb

Go to our website to see how the Covid stay at home regulations affect day to day beekeeping and swarm collecting.
<http://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Covid-19-BBKA-Recommendations.pdf>

NB: The Kent County Show has been cancelled.

Do You Need Frames and Foundation?

As honey bees are livestock, you are allowed to drive short distances to manage them and collect essential equipment. When you require Thornes equipment can you please ring me on 01732 833894 to place your order. This means it will be ready for collection from my porch when you arrive so we can maintain social distancing. Please note there is no discount on some non-hive items. Preferably make payment by BACS, but I still accept cash and cheques.

John Hendrie bibba26@talktalk.net

Colony Loss Survey

Last year several beekeepers in this region participated in the COLOSS survey for Winter Losses in 2018. The survey co-ordinator, Anthony Williams, is asking for volunteers to help again this year:

'Filling in the questionnaire 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 is scheduled to close on the 5th June.' Follow this link to access the survey: <https://www.bee-survey.com/index.php/958611>

Queen Problems at Barrwood

With just Sue Knight and myself looking after Barrwood during the shutdown it would have been nice to say that the second inspection of the year was just a routine inspection to ensure that all was well. Unfortunately, things are rarely so straightforward in beekeeping. The almost continuous summer conditions so early in the year have caused problems for our bees. In natural terms, those colonies best adapted will continue to thrive, whereas others will succumb.



Two colonies were found to have starved, no doubt due to the high brood rearing rate of the queens, but with insufficient forage for the workers. Another colony, however, had stopped brood rearing. Initially this appeared to be a queenless colony, but with the workers acting docile and unstressed it was most likely due to them not feeding the queen so that she would stop laying and the colony could therefore survive until there was greater forage being brought in. An alternative possibility is an adaption to high Varroa infestation. There have been reports of colonies adapting to Varroa by going broodless to prevent the Varroa multiplying. A third possibility is that the colony really is queenless. It was time to investigate this possibility by transferring some eggs from another colony.

However, the next hive showed evidence of my initial thoughts of the queen being starved by the workers. It was a very small colony, but the queen was spotted crawling around on a top bar, ignored by the workers. This was another colony close to starvation. In such cases, it would be regular practice to place the colony in a nuc, or preferably smaller, and feed it but I decided to place the queen in an introduction cage (*pictured above*) and put her in the previous colony (*pictured below*). If the bees were queenless, hopefully they will have nurtured her to full health. If their own queen was present she will no doubt have killed the newcomer.

The suspected drone laying queen from March, turned out not to be so. However, her colony was none too friendly, so she was dispatched and the colony united with the adjacent one. The colony in the 14x12 is, as usual, very strong with plentiful stores but these bees do like to produce propolis, which makes the inspection extended while one scrapes it off the frames.

Last year a late swarm had taken up residence in an old brood box. This year the intention is to use the Bailey comb change method to put the colony on fresh comb. So, as step one, we added a brood box of foundation and fed it.



The next step is that once some foundation has been drawn, find the queen and place her in this new box above a queen excluder. At this inspection, she was easy to find. I am fully expecting her to go into hiding for the next inspection because they always do when you need to find them.

Cliff Hayward

Sunshine and bluebells at Barrwood (left)



Hairspray Havoc

If you listen to Bill Turnbull on Classic FM you might have heard him relate an amusing story about his bees. He was recording an online video at his with the help of his wife. The lockdown had played havoc with his hair so he decided some hairspray was in order. In the heat of the moment he forgot that the bees would react badly. When he returned to the hives, the bees launched an attack on his veil. He escaped unharmed but his wife got stung.

Coronavirus Stings Beekeepers

Anne Nicholls spotted an article in The Economist on the difficulties facing beekeepers in China during the Covid-19 pandemic. Problems caused by coronavirus have overtaken the usual concerns about pesticides. Apiarists, whose only income is from their bees, have been unable to move their hives or even access them with the result that many colonies have died. You can find the article on the Economist website: <https://www.economist.com/china/2020/04/11/chinas-beekeepers-feel-the-sting-of-covid-19>

Send pictures or stories about your bees to marystaffurth@yahoo.com for inclusion in the next Newsletter.