

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2020

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NO 2020 HONEY SHOW

Normally in August we would all be preparing, or at least thinking about, our exhibits for the honey show. Unfortunately, with great regret, the committee has decided to cancel the Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Honey Show in September as a consequence of the current health restrictions. If you have a trophy from last year, please look after it for the time being.

WINTER TALKS

The committee is hoping to run the winter meetings, but is waiting for guidance from BBKA and the hall management committee. More information will be circulated as soon as possible.

AUGUST IN THE APIARY

By Peter Hutton, Branch President

Now you will have started to extract the main crop of honey, or be considering doing so. Some members will have already extracted honey after the spring flow and many of the newer beekeepers will find they have little surplus honey to extract. At the time of writing, July 23, the main flow has declined sharply due to intermittent cold nights and other vagaries of climate change.

Robbing is, for the unwary, a very serious problem and once started not easily stopped. A 20lb super of honey can be cleared in a day or two! The best prevention is to reduce entrance widths and ensure no honey is spilt during inspections. Removal of a hive immediately to a new location is often the only way to stop the robbed hive from being decimated. Returning extracted supers to their original hives to be cleaned up must only be done at night as such excitement during the day will precipitate robbing.

There are several methods and devices to clear the bees from supers, including a chemical to drive the bees down. Some logic thought is needed, if you have three supers to be cleared and a hive full of bees, where will the bees from three supers go? Exactly! So at least one empty super must be inserted temporarily below the full ones. Do not be greedy, if you are running one national brood box there may well be pollen and winter stores in the first super. Beekeepers with larger brood boxes, such as Commercial and Dadant, will usually have sufficient stores in the brood boxes. If you have one National BS brood box, leave the first super for the bees and take out the queen excluder or they will lose the queen over Winter and you will find the bees queenless in early Spring.

Colonies will reduce now from 60,000 down to the Winter level. I have already started feeding late swarms. If you have only a small colony then close down the entrance to less than 3 cm (1 1/8"). Swarms always have a high percentage of young bees, the reason is simple: young bees both feed the queen and the larvae. The next stage of life is processing nectar into honey, secreting wax and building combs. Expecting bees to build combs from now on is not realistic, they will undertake some repairs but little else; from now on is a time to consolidate, dispense with drones and prepare for Winter. If you are thinking of breeding queens, you are too late. If you consider your colony is queenless because you cannot see the queen and there are no eggs to be seen, then do put a piece of comb containing eggs into the brood nest. If the bees draw these down into queen cells then purchase a mated queen immediately, if not then assume your colony to be queen right.

The next job in August is to treat for Varroa, if necessary. You need to check the mite fall either by putting a board in under your screen floor and checking after 48 hours the number of mites on the board, or by using an approved method suggested on the NBU website. A second treatment around December/January with Oxalic acid is recommended. I use an evaporator, which is quick and simple as well as efficient.

EFB UPDATE

Following the incident of EFB near Five Oak Green, the lead bee inspector in our area says the pathogen has been analysed and it has been confirmed that this is a strain of EFB that is common to the Kent area. Kent does seem to be a bit of a hotspot for EFB, so we need to be particularly careful not to move bees around any more than is absolutely necessary, and scrupulous about hygiene when visiting apiaries.

Liz Birchenough

BEES IN THE PORCH



July was another busy month for the swarm collectors. One of the calls answered by John Farrow and Sarah Rapley was to a colony that had made its home in the porch of a flat in an old Tunbridge Wells property. They had to cut through four different layers of ceiling to reach the brood nest. The residents said the colony had arrived a couple of weeks earlier but there were several dark sections of comb indicating that there had been colonies in residence in previous years.

For more details and pictures look on our website under SWARMS/BEES IN BUILDINGS, or follow the link: It should be:

https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Colony-Extraction-from-a-Porch-Ceiling-in-T.Wells_.pdf



This swarm (*pictured left*) was given to an Otford member and now means the Sevenoaks team has nearly fulfilled all the swarm requests in the northern end of the branch area. In the branch as a whole, most of the 35 requests are now satisfied!

This is something that, at the beginning of the season, I believed might be impossible. I think the internet has played a large part in this achievement by its effectiveness in spreading information.

John Farrow, Swarm Co-ordinator

ROBBER BEES AT BARRWOOD

Just one of the advantages of a WBC hive is that it's so easy to observe the bees coming and going on the large, white-painted landing board. They were certainly busy on this particular day. Having only recently stocked the WBC from a nucleus box it was pleasing to see the colony looking so strong. But something didn't seem quite right in the apiary. It didn't take long to spot the issue: robbing.

The WBC wasn't the only hive with a lot of activity, it was just much more visible. The colonies were all making use of a small hole in the top of hive number 3. The gap had been hidden by the roof and so had gone unnoticed when we put the porter escapes on in order to extract the honey. Now, with the incumbent bees only able to get out and not in, and unable to recruit guards, the supers above the porter escapes were being robbed by the other colonies.

After removing supers from the other hives to extract, we returned to hive 3 in order to prevent further robbing, but in the knowledge that our honey yield this year would be reduced by a third, all due to a very small hole. The rather light, robbed supers were taken off the hive and the hole plugged. After opening to allow bees to escape, a crown board was placed on top with a second set of porter escapes to allow bees out but not in.

A moment of pleasure in an otherwise disappointing afternoon was watching, for the first time, how porter escapes work. I had always thought the translucent type of escape somewhat inferior to the metal or white plastic ones but, with them placed 'upside down' on top of the supers, I was able to witness bees trying to push their way out, against a flow of bees trying, unsuccessfully, to push their way in.

My thanks to Tim Johnston for taking away our harvest for extraction.
Cliff Hayward, Chairman and Barrwood Apiary Manager

PREPARING TO EXTRACT AT HILBERT ROAD

At Hilbert Road Robin and I, with Tanya's help, united the top part of a hive - which we had split with a Snelgrove board - with a queenless colony. We used newspaper with cuts to allow slow integration, and this was successful. We are also chalk marking the supers ready for extraction.

Vic Webb, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager

BEEKEEPER'S PLANS MEET STICKY END



I was transporting supers for extraction in my van when some of the honey leaked out. A great number of bees managed to get inside the van so I deliberately opened the back and, within minutes, thousands arrived. After a few hours they had cleaned the back completely and left.

As it was outside my house, I had to alert my neighbours and let them know that there was no danger because the bees were not guarding their own honey in their own hive but were, in effect, robbing. I demonstrated this by standing close to them as they flew all around me. They were not aggressive to me and I could not have cleaned the van with sponge and water and brushes as thoroughly as they did.

Vic Webb

COLONIES FOR SALE

I am reducing the size of my apiary and have colonies for sale, *writes Margaret Everest.*

They are 8 frame polystyrene nuc boxes, all frames covered with bees and brood in all stages, and a super with drawn comb and filling with honey. The cost is £75 each and includes the frames but not the polystyrene box, which needs to be returned promptly. Further colonies will probably be for sale next spring.

Contact: mgt.ev@hotmail.co.uk

MAKING SENSE OF QUEEN SOUNDS

A BBC Online article about research into queen bee sounds generated so much interest and debate among members of the branch that our treasurer and membership secretary, Liz Birchenough, wrote to the researcher, Dr Martin Bencsik, with a compilation of members questions about his work on gynes, which are the bees destined to become queens. Here are the questions and his comprehensive answers:

- 1. Sounds made by newly emerged virgin queens (piping) alert other virgin queens to her presence and triggers the old queen to leave the colony. Is this the effect you are describing?**

Not at all. We are saying that we have strong evidence that sounds inform the colony (i) of the presence of a free-roaming gyne (when tooting is distributed in the colony) (ii) of the availability of captive gynes (when quacks are distributed in the colony). The absence of tooting, combined with the presence of quacks, triggers the release of one gyne, who then starts to toot. We believe that the release is undertaken by the worker bees. This is our big story. It is not a new view, but we have strong evidence to support it.

- 2. Your research suggests the developing queen can make sounds within the queen cell. Is this during the larva stage or after metamorphosis to the adult form?**

Good question. I would have thought that quacking queens are ready to emerge. The worker bees, however, are keeping them captive.

- 3. How do workers inhibit or permit the release of a new queen from the Q cell? Is this as simple as the workers have to physically break open the wax cell?**

Good question. We think that they re-seal the wax that is being cut by the gyne. If you carefully inspect queen cells, you will see the cap having a very different colour and a clear circular boundary, we think that this is further evidence of the queen attempts to come out, whilst workers re-seal the cap. We think that beekeeping inspections can interfere with worker bees trying to keep the gynes captive.

- 4. Are the sounds made by the queen generated by mechanical vibrations in her body? If so, how can she make such different types of sound? Does she use the queen cell as a resonant chamber to magnify the sound?**

Good question. We think that the vast majority of signals, indeed, are vibrational. We think that they are body vibrations. It is possible that the cell is used as a resonator.

- 5. Since worker bees do not "hear" as we understand as mammals, are they actually responding to vibrations?**

Very much so. The free-roaming gyne distributes the vibration (toot) on all frames. The frames convey the vibration over a few cm. We have lots of evidence that worker bees are EXQUISITELY sensitive to vibrations.

PS: occasionally two or more queens will be found in a swarm. We think that (i) the system is not perfect and that worker bees will occasionally be overwhelmed by the powerful gyne insisting that she wants to emerge, (ii) beekeeping inspections will perhaps interfere with the phenomenon, (iii) weather will sometimes delay the swarming too much, overwhelming the mechanism.

Our paper can be downloaded for free: <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41598-020-66115-5>

SURPLUS HONEY?

We have been approached by Beeble Drinks, who are interested in buying honey from local beekeepers to use in their products. They are initially looking for 30lb for sampling. If the samples are satisfactory they will then be looking for batches of 100lb. If you are interested, please contact Matt on 07958 244011 or email matt@beebble.buzz

Please note that any arrangement would be between the beekeeper and the drinks company. The branch is not connected with Beeble Drinks or any other commercial enterprise. Thanks to Vanessa Jones for bringing this to our attention.

Liz Birchenough

DIARY OF A NEW BEEKEEPER



The trio's new beesuits get their first outing

One new Sevenoaks beekeeper, Chris Stewart, has documented his first year as an apiarist in words and pictures on our website. He describes how he was thrown in the deep end during his first visit to Barrwood Apiary when he was invited to open up a hive instead of just watching. With two friends, Malcolm and Betty, he embarked on some very thorough research into beekeeping, visiting a number of beekeeping club apiaries and doing an evening course.

After some hiccups the team managed to find a site for their bees at Riverhead allotments. They picked up their first colony of bees from the Yalding club apiary and got them home even though some managed to escape during the journey.

For Chris's full article and more pictures go to our website:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/07/Riverhead-New-Beekeepers-1st-Year-1.pdf>

Please send any pictures or articles for September's newsletter to
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