

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2020

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Winter Meetings on the Web

As it looks as though the coronavirus situation is not going to improve significantly in the near future, the committee has decided to present the winter programme of events on Zoom. Our first talk will be on Wednesday 21st October at 7.30pm (estimated duration 1 hour 30 mins). John Hendrie will give a talk on "The health of the hive". We do hope you will be able to log in. The link will be sent out with a reminder just before the meeting. The AGM in November will also be a Zoom meeting.

Liz Birchenough, Membership Secretary and Treasurer

September Swarms



Low Hanging Bees

What an interesting year 2020 has been for bees. In the space of 10 days in September I received three calls for bee swarms from members of the public. After chatting to the callers, two turned out not to be honey bees. The third one was a honey bee swarm that had alighted on a low level shrub in a garden, which had all but collapsed onto the grass. The bees looked a bit subdued and sorry for themselves, due to the cool temperature and wind, when I arrived in late afternoon. The cluster was small and not viable for survival over winter so was added by the newspaper method to an earlier swarm collected in late July.

I wonder how many other "late" swarms and callouts other members have dealt with this year. I have learnt never to be surprised by bees - but a large swarm in mid September! Surely they know their chances of survival through the winter are pretty slim. Were they trying escape disease or, as Peter Hutton thinks, were these late swarms a result of imported bees being out of sync with our climate?

Tim Johnston

Apple Tree Cluster

This late swarm in Borough Green was hanging 12ft up in an apple tree and I needed my extendable pole to reach the cluster. To make it more exciting, the bees were over a pond. I collected the majority in my skep and, because of the size of the swarm, I was glad I had brought my poly nucleus. There was still a clump of bees on the branch but because others were fanning at the entrance I was confident they would get the message. I decided to leave them to settle and promised to call back in the evening. At 8pm there was still a large number on the front, covering the entrance, so I decided to wrap them up for transportation in my car the next day.

In the morning half the colony was outside under the sheet, so I thought it best to swiftly transport them to my apiary. I will leave to your imagination how I got them into one of my National hives but suffice to say it took me most of the morning.

John Farrow, Swarm Co-ordinator



We Need Your Help

As it seems increasingly unlikely that we will be able to get back to anything like normal soon, the committee is looking at ways to change our usual format of programme. I hope there are some members who feel they could contribute to this process and would be prepared to join the committee. You do not have to be an experienced beekeeper, in fact quite the opposite, as we would appreciate the views of the majority of our membership. Please do get in touch to discuss this with me: 01732 750885 / pbhayward9@hotmail.com

Cliff Hayward, Chairman

Terry Clare

It is with great sadness that we report the death of Terry Clare. Terry was a well-known lecturer throughout the UK and Ireland, and was also a familiar figure within the beekeeping community of Kent, where he had lived for many years. Although Terry had been in declining health for some time, he was still caring for his own bees until a few months ago. He will be much missed by his friends and family, as well as members of the wider beekeeping community who benefited from his guidance and experience over the years.

Liz Birchenough

Ready for Winter at Hilbert Road

At Hilbert Road we have seven strong hives going into winter after a reasonable crop of honey considering the weather. They have been fed 100 kg of dissolved sugar and, because they took this down, I fed them another 25 kg. The bees are taking in large amounts of pollen, which I think is mostly from ivy. Ten days ago Tania Kennedy and I used formic acid on five hives as a varroa treatment; it was donated for use just before its expiry date. It is truly shocking stuff and it is a wonder the bees survived and are thriving. We also treated two hives with Apiguard for varroa. The formic acid strips stayed on for seven days and the Apiguard will stay on for six weeks.

I would like to thank Robin Toop and Tania for their invaluable physical help over the past year, and I am also grateful for the most welcome and helpful advice from our president, Peter Hutton. I am satisfied that the hives in the apiary are in very good shape to go into winter.

Victor Webb, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager

End of the Season at Barrwood

September in the apiary was concentrated on getting enough stores into the bees to give them the best chance of surviving the winter. With the normal late forage of blackcurrant and ivy seeming to finish very early, most of the colonies were rapidly depleting their supplies. There were some colonies that had gone off lay altogether. It would be nice to think of this as an adaptation to high varroa levels, or that the normal winter brood break is being carried out early. However, I suspect it is more a result of the workers reducing the feeding of the queen due to the ending of their natural forage.

The colony on the 14x12 had, at the start of the season, been our most prolific in terms of drawing out new comb and filling it with brood, although this also meant it was the most prolific propolis producer too. Unfortunately this high productivity was not to last. I think the queen was superseded late in the season, and the new one failed to mate sufficiently, developing into a drone-layer. My suspicion was raised immediately on finding drones still in the colony in mid-September. There is some debate as to the wisdom of uniting such a drone-laying colony, so the colony was sacrificed. The stores were donated to other colonies, and I consoled myself with the thought that it always produced so much propolis that it made inspections very difficult, and needed to be culled in any case.

Cliff Hayward, Chairman and Barrwood Apiary Manager

Wanted: Garden Furniture

If anyone has any garden furniture, which is usable but surplus to requirements, please get in touch. We are looking for some additional seating for Barrwood apiary.

Liz Birchenough

Bees in the Roof

These photographs are of a clever operation carried out by Leo Wells (*writes David Candlin*). The bees had been around for many months and others had declined to try to remove them. The nest/swarm was collected and brought down to my small apiary in Hildenborough, where the bees were easily transferred to an empty hive. We have had a very poor year and so they are much welcomed. Leo was trained at Plumpton Agricultural College and has now started a Pest Control business called Envirowell.



The Honey bees were located inside this Dormer window, they entered the void beneath the tiles just below the ridge tiles. The tiles were removed to expose the colony. The comb was attached to the underside of the liner but, due to the weight of the comb, the bees had caused the liner to rip and collapse. Once the liner had been removed we could get to work removing the comb and locating the queen. None of the comb that was removed had honey stores and there was only a small patch of brood.

The Queen was successfully located and was transferred into the nuc box so the workers could follow her pheromone for a successful removal. After the bees and comb were removed, the rafters were all scraped to remove as much wax as possible before insulating, which will help prevent a new colony of bees returning in the future.



All the latest beekeeping news and information is available on our website:

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

Please send any photos or items for the newsletter to

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