

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2020

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



Branch Honey for Sale



We still have plenty of honey for sale from our two apiaries at Barrwood, near Sevenoaks, and Hilbert Road, in Tunbridge Wells. This would make an ideal Christmas present and you would be supporting the Branch with your purchase. There is no limit on the number of jars you can buy. The Tunbridge Wells honey is bottled in 1lb jars, costing £6.50 each; the Sevenoaks honey is bottled in 12oz jars, costing £5 each. To buy, contact Liz Birchenough: membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Meetings go Online

Our first Branch Zoom meeting took place on Wednesday 21 October. Twenty members dialled in to hear John Hendrie talk about The Health of the Hive. Worries about IT problems were largely unfounded, and we even managed a socially distanced chat amongst ourselves while waiting for everyone to log in. It was really nice to meet a few new members for the first time, as well as old friends we have not seen for months.

John divided his talk into two main problem areas: pests and diseases. As far as pests are concerned, the timing of the talk was serendipitous, as wasps, mice and woodpeckers will be sneaking up on us as we approach winter. John also reminded us about securing our hives against wind and rain over winter.

Varroa is probably the most common pest we have to deal with, and there is a plethora of treatment options available. On the bio-tech front, you can use queen traps, drone brood removal and shook swarm methods, all of which physically remove the parasites from the hive. There are also a number of chemical treatments available. The effectiveness of chemical treatments (and beekeeper safety) depends on absolute adherence to the manufacturer's instructions. John also briefly mentioned the use of icing sugar, which is not approved and can dehydrate healthy larvae by absorbing moisture in the cells. The top tip is to monitor your Varroa levels and treat promptly using an approved method or combinations of methods.

Thankfully, some of the potentially more serious pests such as Asian Hornet, and Small Hive Beetle are very rare, but could become more common if we do not maintain vigilance. Similarly, the foul brood diseases, which are rightly treated very seriously, are not particularly common, although there was a small outbreak of EFB in the Kent area earlier this year. John showed some photographs of AFB and EFB with the characteristic distortion of the cell caps. John was at pains to emphasise that some diseases are not easy to diagnose, and it can be easy to confuse a number of infections.

So - what can we do? Well, there is nothing new here. Good apiary hygiene is crucial. Regular and thorough inspections (every 7-10 days in the summer) are essential but don't be tempted to over inspect, as this can stress the bees and actually lead to infections taking hold. If you spot something that worries you, don't panic but equally don't ignore it. Most of the serious infections are not common, but do seek a second opinion from an experienced Branch member, and don't forget to sign up to Beebase, which has a range of information available, and the contact details of the bee inspectors in each area. In addition, in the event of an outbreak of a notifiable infection near you, you will get a message.

I think the point to take home from this talk is that there are remarkable similarities to the coronavirus situation. Ensure good hygiene and apiary management, look out for symptoms, and get help quickly.

Liz Birchenough

Zoom in to Branch AGM

The 103rd AGM of Sevenoaks and Tunbridge Wells Beekeepers Association will be held on Wednesday 18 November 2020 at 7.30pm on Zoom. Liz Birchenough has already emailed the details to all members. If you wish to nominate a member for the committee, or add an item for discussion under Any Other Business, please contact John Farrow on stweditor@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk before Wednesday 11 November 2020.

Future Talks

Two very interesting talks have been lined up by the Branch committee for December and January. Both will take place via Zoom and they will be on Tuesdays.

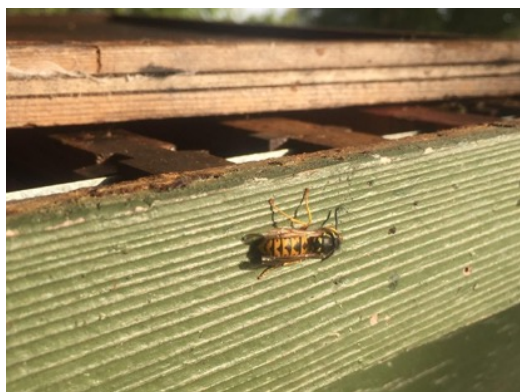
Anne Rowberry, Chairman of BBKA and a Master Beekeeper, will give a talk on Tuesday 15 December at 7.30 pm entitled: 'I want the best bee!' She will cover the characteristics of the main races of bee found in the UK, giving their advantages and problems. The issues concerning importing bees and breeding your own queens will also be discussed. This will be useful for those starting beekeeping, to help them decide which strain will be best for them.

On Tuesday 19 January 2021 Margaret Murdin NDB, the immediate past president of BBKA and a Master Beekeeper will give a talk entitled: 'Simple Bee Genetics'. She will consider why we sometimes get poor brood patterns and ask exactly what are diploid drones? There will be some comparison of genetics between humans and bees and a look at why some characteristics are dominant, such as colour. You will also find out why we sometimes find white-eyed drones in our colonies.

Membership Renewal

If you have forgotten to renew your Branch membership, now is the time to act. If you have mislaid the form that was emailed then please contact our membership secretary Liz Birchenough: membership@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

Queen Wasp



This image is of a queen wasp resting on the outside of one of my hives in early October. She was obviously deciding which hive roof to hibernate under over winter. *John Farrow.*

Hives for Sale

Empty hives for sale, suitable for a new beekeeper looking to get their first colonies next spring. The hives are nearly new and in good condition.

2 x Nationals, each complete with 1 x brood box, 3 x supers, floor, roof and stand (£50 each). In addition, 1 x hornet trap base and spare super.

Reason for sale: the owner has developed a serious bee sting allergy. Contact Conrad on 01732 850495 (Hadlow area)

Why the Bees Should Stay Put

I recently had a call from someone who is having an extension built on his tile hung cottage but has found a colony of bees behind the tiles. My knowledge of the construction industry is invaluable but I no longer undertake this type of work. My advice is that bees can be successfully removed from the beginning of March to early May. The reasoning is that there is the minimum honey present after the winter cluster has broken and winter stores have been consumed. More importantly, the colony will be developing rapidly so, however disruptive the process of removal might be, the bees' survival is assured.

This problem highlights the difference between the colonies in summer and the bees currently in our hives from now until, say, early January. These are winter bees and they live beyond their six-week lifespan just so long as they do not start feeding larvae (inducing their glands to operate).

Peter Hutton, Branch President

Bees on the Net

In addition to the Branch Meetings on Zoom, any new beekeepers might care to watch some of these YouTube videos on the cold autumn nights.

All are on the website under 'INFORMATION' / 'ARTICLES' & WEB WATCH. Click on:

- [Inside the Colony – the full story from start to finish.](#)
- [Beekeeping \[How To Videos\] by UoG Honey Bee Research Centre](#)
- [Facts about Bees, Wasps & Hornets \[stunning imagery\]](#)

The first is a beautifully crafted video [54 mins] on the life of a colony. It should have won a photography award for its stunning images within and outside the hive.

The second consists of 32 short videos on wide-ranging topics from lighting a smoker to raising queens. They are very concise, no waffle, as they are compiled by the Honey Bee Research Centre.

A third video [49 mins] on the facts about wasps, bees and hornets has equally stunning imagery.

If you see any videos on the internet of the standard of these three and you think would be of interest to our membership, please email the link to: stweditor@sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk

John Farrow, Website Editor

The Fight Against Varroa

Some of our members took up the invitation from our neighbours in Westerham Branch to join them for an online meeting in October. The speaker was Professor Steve Martin from the University of Salford. He is a leading entomologist and has been researching Varroa infestation in honey bees, which was the subject of his talk. This is a BBKA funded project, and members of the Westerham Branch have been involved. This article is a very short summary of a very detailed project, and only touches on a few highlights.

Varroa has been the bane of beekeepers lives for about thirty years. The advice on treatment has varied as different medications have been developed. Varroa infestations weaken the bees and are a vector for viral infections, especially deformed wing virus (DWV). The received wisdom for years has been that Varroa must be controlled, preferably using an approved medication.

Professor Martin's research has gone back to basics. There have always been beekeepers who choose not to medicate their bees, and it seems that there are some bees that are far better able to live with Varroa than others. However, as this form of management has not been considered mainstream, many of these beekeepers have just kept quiet. From a scientific research point of view, Professor Martin and his team needed to sort out the facts from the anecdotes and lucky chances. In summary, they concluded that by constant intervention, beekeepers were not allowing bees to develop natural resistance to the effects of Varroa. Their findings from test colonies throughout the country show that bees can develop strategies for controlling levels of Varroa, specifically opening up the cells containing developing larvae, and extracting the parasites. Healthy cells are resealed and seem to continue to develop into healthy bees. The effect of removing the parasites early reduces the reproduction rate, which helps to control the overall Varroa load.

In summary, Professor Martin's research suggests that honey bee colonies can survive and thrive without Varroa medication but this does not mean you can just leave them to get on with it. The beekeeper needs to monitor the health of the hive very carefully, as not all bees will be efficient at removing parasites and can become overwhelmed. It may take several years to get your colonies working well and, in large apiaries, there is always the danger of cross infection from nearby hives. If you want to try this with your own colonies, please make sure you get advice and guidance so you can set up an action plan before changing your existing Varroa treatment plan.

More information is available through Beebase (National Bee Unit website).

Liz Birchenough

More Live Talks on the Internet

A beekeeping talk will be given to the Federation of Irish Bee Keepers Association on November 10 at 7.30pm by Celia Davis entitled: Winter & Summer Bees. It is free but you need to register https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/celia-davis-presents-winter-summer-bees-tickets-122017392305?aff=ebdssbeac&keep_tld=1

Kent County Council is holding a virtual summit to discuss its Plan Bee pollinator project. It takes place on November 16 from 10am to 12 noon. It is free but you need to register.

https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/kents-plan-bee-virtual-summit-2020-tickets-123471523651?_cldee=cGV0ZXluaHV0dG9uQGJ0aW50ZXJuZXQuY29t&recipientid=contact-1f75e14e2c83e71180e4005056a72151-14555188b34c40fea0bbd8ef44981449&esid=918dfc83-a917-eb11-810c-005056b16576