

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER FEBRUARY 2021

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February in the Apiary

We had yo-yoing weather in January from drenching rain, fine drizzle, hoar frost and ground frost to sunshine at 12°C. How is this affecting our bees? Hefting your hives can only give you an idea. Lift the roof and crown board and if you cannot see sealed honey close around and above the bees then assume they might starve and feed them. February and March are the months when colonies fail by way of starvation so it is worth giving your bees a pack of fondant, with or without added nutrients. Feed directly over the brood area.

Green woodpeckers are still likely to attack hives to get a meal of bees and they have a healthy appetite for honey, worst of all they spoil the hives and stress the bees. Gorse is still in flower and hazel catkins are at various stages of development.

Storm Christoph has passed but when considering sites for out-apiaries give a thought to possible flooding. There are plans to raise the Tonbridge flood barrier by a metre or more, if that happens then I will have to move my hives away from Penshurst as they are barely half a metre above the highest flood level point.

A bee returning to the hive laden with nectar, pollen, water or propolis will take the path of least resistance. In towns, they fly between buildings as much as possible rather than constantly up and down. In South Tonbridge there is an estate of semi-detached houses with garages and the bees fly just above the garage roofs. I went to investigate when some terrified mothers with youngsters complained of dangerous attacks by bees. Although there were no such attacks I mediated and the beekeeper moved his hives a quarter of a mile away onto farmland out of sight. In the countryside bees fly low above open ground at about 15 cm. They follow the path of least resistance, rising or diverting around livestock and rising for hedgerows or solid obstructions.

Peter Hutton, Branch President

Is There a Mouse in the House?



It is important to check mouse guards regularly. I noticed that an ill-fitting one of mine had come loose. Further inspection revealed evidence of a mouse nest in the foam insulation on top of the crown board. I didn't see a mouse but quickly secured the entrance slide to prevent it from happening again.

I hope the mice haven't damaged any stores or comb - but it was too cold to have a proper look inside.

Sarah Rapley



The Science of Bees

At our first Zoom meeting of the year we were treated to a professional delivery of a talk designed to allow a mixed audience of beekeepers to understand the basics of a very complicated scientific subject: genetics. Margaret Murdin, the immediate past President of BBKA, took us through the complications associated with bee breeding step by step. She talked about sex determining genes and patriline: a queen mates with about 15 drones, which means that the bees in a single colony will have up to 15 different fathers. Margaret also mentioned worker policing, involving workers eating eggs laid by their half-sisters. It was hard to take it all in and to remember but fortunately the talk is in print and has been emailed with this newsletter.

Vic Webb

Margaret Murdin's lecture was excellent for anyone wanting to know more about the biology of bees (*writes Peter Hutton*). I missed it but in 1994 I attended an instrumental insemination of queen bees course at the Hessen State Institute for Beekeeping in Germany. So, I have already learnt much of the subject, albeit in German. I bought a book from Northern Bee Books in English: *Essence and Mechanism of Nest Abandonment by Honeybee Swarms* by Zbigniew Lipiński. This book underwrites that lecture and much more. It is not a book for beginners but for those with enquiring minds and wider horizons. It reviews and quotes almost all research works worldwide. If you have just read the transcript of Margaret Murdin's talk and it has whetted your appetite to learn more of the science or are preparing for the NDB examination then this is a book for reference. It won a Gold Medal at the 37th Apimondia Congress in Durban.

Colony Theft

We have received a report of the theft of a hive of bees in Tunbridge Wells. The colony was in a National hive, complete with two supers. We think the thief, or thieves, struck during the very cold weather when the bees were least active. Please take a good look at your own security, and make sure your hives are marked in some way, even felt pen would do, and maybe take a photo for your own records. If you hear of anyone unexpectedly trying to sell or dispose of a live colony, please contact a committee member.

Liz Birchenough

New Bee Partner Wanted

My name is Mark Young, I live in the middle of Tunbridge Wells, and I'm mostly retired (normally one day per week in the City). I have kept bees with a neighbour for about six years and we have 22 hives on a fruit farm near Pembury. We made most of our hives from scratch and some of the kit needs to be repaired or replaced. We sell the honey in shops in and around Tunbridge Wells.

Unfortunately, my colleague no longer wants to continue and I am considering buying him out. I'm looking for a bee partner as it would be more fun - and I'm getting old! I would prefer someone with a degree of experience as I don't pretend to know everything; my current partner took the lead. I would expect the new partner to either buy his/her way in (on the spot or over a period) or bring in a similar number of colonies, or a combination of the two.

Contact Mark Young: 07773 281962

Apiary Site Wanted

One of our new members, Kris, is looking for an apiary because he cannot keep bees at home. He recently joined our branch, having completed an introductory course at his previous address. He is interested in teaming up with an established beekeeper locally, to help out and learn while getting a site organised for his own bees in the future. Kris is based in TN8 (Four Elms) and can be contacted on chay.kris@gmail.com or 07421 264950

Old WBC Needs a Home



We have just moved into a property in Tonbridge and have discovered we have a bee hive in our garden (*pictured left*). We don't know if it has bees inside. We are happy for someone to take the hive away if they would like it (and also the bees if there are any.)

Laura Parkes 07979693310

lh_parkes@hotmail.com

New Beekeeper in Search of Hive

I am a new member of the branch and am hoping to receive my first colony this spring. I am in search of second-hand National hive(s) brood box, supers etc. for the new arrivals. Please contact Julian Brewer on 01732-883579 or 07598-261665 (Ightham area) if you are looking to dispose of a hive to a good home.

Hilbert Road

I have completed the scorching of all the boxes and frames in the bee house and cleaned it ready for bees with assistance from Huw who I now meet every Monday morning at the apiary unless it is raining hard. He has taken over from Tania, who now has a full-time job. We also burnt some more rubbish cuttings and he mended a super with an extra strip of wood. Huw has a plot of land on the way to Wadhurst and will start two hives there this year when swarms are available. My next project is to renew the felt on the shed roof.

Vic Webb, Hilbert Road Apiary Manager

On the Web

Go to our website for more on bees and beekeeping. You can read an update on neonicotinoids:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/neonics-letter-update-26-1-21.pdf>

There is a letter from the President of the BBKA, Margaret Wilson, on the noticeboard:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Presidents-Letter-Jan21.pdf>

You can fill in a questionnaire about the BBKA News, which is seeking readers' opinions:

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/news/bbka-news-reader-survey>

Must-See Video

I joined the Medway Branch Zoom meeting in January for Wally Shaw's talk: Simple Methods of Making Increase. It was hugely oversubscribed and so live-streamed on YouTube. Unfortunately, the video is no longer available but I have found another video covering the topic, which I recommend: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZqTtdGuMLbo>

John Farrow

Diary Dates

Tuesday 16 February at 7.30pm via Zoom - Julia Pigott: Sweetness and Light - Our Relationship with Honey Bees. Julia's wide ranging talk covers honey bee history and evolution as well as the history of human/honey bee interaction.

Tuesday 16 March at 7.30pm via Zoom - Andrew Durham: Asian Hornet; lessons from the French experience.

Send pictures or items for the newsletter to marystaffurth@yahoo.com