

SEVENOAKS AND TUNBRIDGE WELLS BEEKEEPERS BRANCH NEWSLETTER APRIL 2021

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Opening the Club Apiaries

The committee has been following the latest advice about getting back to our club apiaries. Our top priority is your health and safety. We are aware that many of our members are in higher risk groups due to age, so we are drawing up a plan which will allow limited access to the apiaries. We will circulate the plan to you all later in April once clarification has come from BBKA.

Liz Birchenough, Membership Secretary and Treasurer

Get Ahead of the Bees

Spring has arrived and our first inspections can start on one of the early warm days. There have been losses due to rapidly changing weather, disappearing queens, and many colonies have failed probably due to paralysis virus, once called the Marie Celeste syndrome.

Those of you who watched the Ged Marshall Zoom talk* will recall how, when one of his colonies swarms, he not only changes the old queen but also the new queen as he considers that line to be swarmy. Then the Zoom talk by Jeff Pettis* showed the result of dissection of queens to examine the content of the spermatheca. Of interest is the amount of viable live sperms and the quantity of dead sperms, which may well be a reason for colony losses such as we are observing over recent winters. A lot of these queens are bought in and have been stressed whilst travelling, either being too cold or overheating.

Now is the time to stock up with spare equipment before your bees swarm, rather than the day after when everyone else wants that extra equipment. May is the month when bees draw the most comb, so have supers ready and, for best results, stagger frames with foundation between drawn combs. Also, now is time to put Manley frames of drone foundation in the supers; a National or Commercial super takes 10 Manley frames. Why do I suggest Manley with drone foundation? Because, when extracting, drone cells release honey more readily because there is less friction in the larger cells.

After my disastrous fire last June, a few members, to whom I am very grateful, assisted me with wax and woodwork when three-quarters of a tonne of beeswax plus a great deal of machinery went up in smoke. I am now looking for more beeswax and, having repaired my wax melter, I can accept old combs for rendering. I will be happy to purchase rendered wax. I have already taken delivery of my new foundation moulds and have a new wax clarifying and sterilising machine due next week.

Peter Hutton, Branch President

**Links to these talks and the other UKBA Winter Webinars are included at the end of this newsletter.*

Making Space at Hilbert Road

Huw and I have started to put in shelving to hold brood boxes and supers in the main shed. Five metal uprights have been purchased and installed as well as five arms and shelving at one level. So far, twelve uprights have been purchased and installation is an ongoing project with rescued boarding being recycled. A hardwood length of rescued timber will be screwed along the bottom of the front doors to prevent rodents gaining access through holes which they have already made. Further shelving will be installed in the main shed and then the bee house. Cupboards that are in poor shape will be removed to give more space.



Old hives are being flamed, wire brushed, and painted, to bring them back into use or for sale. Black ties have been obtained and used on the perimeter railings to lock in green mesh to limit bee flight across the adjacent pedestrian path and road. We are continuing to burn clippings from laurel and other plants in an incinerator. We need more green mesh on the Hilbert Road side and the wood fencing, which was installed a couple of years ago, is tilting over and needs to be hammered in and possibly braced. The water fountain (*pictures left*) is being well used by the bees.

Vic Webb, Apiary manager



When is a Beehive not a Beehive?

I am sure you have all seen WBC hives repurposed as letter boxes and other garden features, but I bet none of you have one of these in your garden. When Andrew and I retired, we both had the opportunity to spend more time on our hobbies. Andrew had always been interested in radio astronomy. Optical astronomy is tricky in the suburbs: street lights, clouds and waiting up until the middle of a cold night is not really on his "to do" list. Radio astronomy is rather different. It is possible to detect and record a wide range of events such as solar flares and passing meteors from the comfort of your own shed. This is genuine citizen science, equipment is designed and constructed by team members, and results shared widely.



I was a little concerned when Andrew started rummaging through my spare hive parts. He has a magnetometer which detects fluctuations in the earth's magnetic field caused by solar flares and changes in the stream of charged particles from the sun. The solar wind causes the aurora. Major solar events can also cause disruption to satellites and interfere with terrestrial power and communications networks. The magnetometer is very sensitive, so needs to be away from the house where movement and electrical equipment disturb the magnetic field.

The magnetometer fits perfectly inside a national super, so one of my spares has been "borrowed". However, mesh floors and galvanised roofs contain ferrous metals which affect the signals. A standard solid wood floor was easy to find, and of course, the entrance block was exactly the right size to get the cables in and out. The roof was a bit more of a problem; however, copper sheet roofs are available although a bit more expensive than the standard galvanised steel ones. The beehive is a perfect enclosure as it is the right size, weatherproof and free from ferrous metals. Data collection is now in progress. More information is available through ukraa.com

Liz Birchenough

For Sale: Hives with Colonies

Five Langstroth hives, each with an active colony are for sale at £175 each. Each one has an open mesh floor, brood box, queen excluder, 2 x supers with frames, a crown board, roof and an Ashforth feeder. All are in good condition.

There are also empty hives and other equipment for sale, including a table top manual extractor.



Contact Bret McCulloch 07 871 098 989

To see more details and pictures follow this link to our website:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Sale-of-Langstroth-Hives-etc-1.pdf>

How to Counter the Asian Hornet

Our March Zoom talk was given by Andrew Durham, who has carried out his own research into the Asian Hornet and its spread across Europe. He told us that it was a serious problem but one, perhaps, that we could manage in Britain. He pointed out that despite the presence of the Asian Hornet in France, Varroa was still the number one pest for French apiarists.

As far as traps are concerned, Andrew said that selective trapping was best. Beekeepers should be on the lookout for Asian Hornets and only put out traps when they find them. This will prevent large numbers of other insects being trapped and killed, as has happened in France.

Andrew told us that we could all help to reduce the risk to our colonies by careful bee management. He advised keeping strong colonies, being careful about apiary hygiene, supplementing diet and feeding, treating for Varroa, and leaving some honey for the bees when extracting.

Mary Staffurth

Small Hive Beetle Threat

BBKA has organized a parliamentary petition stop the importation of honey bees into Britain from the EU via Northern Ireland. It is concerned that this could allow Small Hive Beetle to arrive with bees from southern Italy. You can read more by following this link to our website, where the full details have been posted on the Notice Board:

<https://www.sevenoaksbeekeepers.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/Importing-Honey-Bees-into-GB.pdf>

BDI (Bee Diseases Insurance) is also supporting the petition and you can follow this link to read its concerns about importing bees: <https://www.beediseasesinsurance.co.uk/about-1/news-1>

Aggressive Bees (Why it can pay to try something different)

The text book way of dealing with aggressive bees is to move the brood box with the queen a reasonable distance away so that all the flying bees return to a brood box on the original site. This just leaves the house bees with the queen and makes her far easier to find, catch and despatch.



A nearby beekeeper was having so much difficulty dealing with her aggressive bees that she was going to sell them. She called me asking what she should do, as selling a hive with aggressive bees was not an option.

When I went round I found the hive with the bees was far too heavy to move any distance. So, I took off the empty hive, slid the hive with the bees to the right and turned it through 90 degrees and reassembled the empty hive on the left-hand side. All the flying bees immediately congregated at this entrance and started taking in pollen.

The bees with the queen took exception to the move and showed their aggression by following me all the way to my car some 50 metres away.

Bret and I called the next day to find the queen and replace her with one of his small colonies that he was willing to donate. I was quite prepared for the bees to sense the queen pheromone in the right-hand colony and all finish up back with all the other bees. Not so, as it was obvious that all the flying bees were now in

the left-hand hive because the bees with the queen were now so well behaved it was quite remarkable and made finding her so easy. Sometimes it's worth defying convention and trying something different.

John Farrow

April Talk

Tuesday 13 April at 7.30pm via Zoom - Celia Davis: Beekeeper v Bee: How our activities as beekeepers impact on the natural life of the honeybee colony. Celia Davis NDB, is author of *The Honey Bee Inside Out* and *The Honey Bee Around and About*.

Learning to Love Zoom

It's strange how one adapts to new challenges. I never thought I would look forward to a Zoom meeting in the evening. How things change. For our own branch, this has enabled us to invite speakers from anywhere in the country and, thanks to John Hendrie's contacts with the higher echelons of the beekeeping world, we have been able to learn from the President and Chairman of BBKA. As well as holding our own meetings, many other beekeeping groups have allowed us access to their organised Zoom lectures. BIBBA and the Ulster beekeepers have been, and continue to be, particularly active.

I even came to enjoy running a novice beekeeping course for eight of our members. After my initial concerns and worries, with everyone so supportive and tolerant of my inexperience of using the Zoom programme, I soon settled to enjoy myself. The small number of participants allows far more participation and discussion. I need to thank John Hendrie for setting it all up for me, helping me to get started each week and ensuring it went ahead.

Such meetings keep us informed and entertained but we do lack the social interaction that meeting in person at a venue provides. Hopefully, we can have a mixture of the two from now on. For the moment, I am looking forward to hearing Celia Davis at our April branch Zoom meeting. As Celia is one of the leading Beekeeping scientists in the country and the author of beekeeping books and scientific papers, I am particularly interested in her views on the issue of how much stress we cause our bees each time we inspect. Should we inspect less? Her title *Bees versus Beekeepers*, promises to answer this conundrum.

Cliff Hayward, Branch Chairman

* Here are the links to the Ulster Beekeepers Association Winter Webinars recommended by Peter Hutton. They will remain live until the end of June:

[UBKA Winter Webinars '21 - "New Year Management" with Ged Marshall](#)

[UBKA Winter Webinars '21 - "Swarm Control" with Ged Marshall](#)

[UBKA Winter Webinars '21 - "Landscape & Bees" with Jane Stout](#)

[UBKA Winter Webinars '21 - "Impact of Pesticides on Bees" with Jeff Pettis](#)

[UBKA Winter Webinars '21 - "Why are Queens Failing?" with Jeff Pettis](#)

[UBKA Winter Webinars '21 - "Queen Management Essentials" with Juliana Rangel](#)

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