

Gravesend Beeline

The newsletter
of the
Gravesend Branch
of KBKA
February

2015



Hi everyone,

Now is the time to keep an eye on the stores inside your hives. As the weather warms up and colonies start to increase in size, the bees' need for food can increase dramatically. Now is the time to heft the hives or, on warmer days, to have a quick look inside to make sure there are still enough stores left. If not, then put some fondant on top of the frames or cover board – covered in plastic to stop it drying out. Colonies are more likely to starve in the Spring than in Winter, so check them regularly. If you need fondant in a hurry, then let me know, as the club keeps a small store at a very competitive price.

Club dinner

The annual club dinner was a great success again this year with around 40 people attending. We were given our own dedicated room and the event gave everyone the chance to meet old friends and meet new ones.



WANTED: Council rep

We have the opportunity for one more of our members to represent the club at the Kent Council meetings. There are four meetings a year – the next one is Saturday 14 March at Lenham. I am already a branch rep and am happy to drive a fellow member to the meetings. If you would like to know more, please give me a call and I can tell you more about the meetings and how they work. This is a great opportunity to influence beekeeping in Kent and I hope someone will volunteer.

(Lesley 01474 70266)

See page 2 for
member profile

All you need to know about swarms

Collecting swarms can be a very rewarding experience: not only do you get a free colony of bees, and possibly the eternal gratitude of a member of the public, you may even get the chance to rescue half of one of your own colonies. But, as many of us will confirm, there are a lot of pitfalls to avoid along the way.



Asking the right questions when someone calls for help, taking the right equipment on the visit, and hiving the swarm so it doesn't abscond, are just some of the points to consider. For our next meeting at Cobham Hall, we have an outside speaker who will give us a guide to swarm collecting and an insight into some of his own experiences. This is the ideal time to get some valuable tips before the swarm season gets under way this year, so put the date in your diary:

Sunday 22 March 2.30

2015 meetings

We now have a preliminary meetings programme for 2015. It is on the final page of this newsletter, after our second member profile. A revised programme will be sent out as and when meetings are confirmed.

Lesley

PS If you have any suggestions for future meeting subjects or feedback on the dinner, please let me know (01474 70266; lesleyfancote@msn.com).



Personal Profile



Peter Smith

Peter is Website Administrator and Education Co-ordinator of the Gravesend branch of the KBKA. He has been keeping bees for three years, and has a mix of British National and Langstroth hives on two locations in Higham. Peter gave us some insight into how he started beekeeping and his experience with different types of hive.....

"I've always had an allotment and been interested in bees since my 20's, but never had the time. I lived next door to a very experienced beekeeper who used to hold meetings with Gravesend Beekeepers in his garden. The sight of a dozen or more beekeepers in the garden opening hives used to fascinate me. Although the hives were only 20 yards or so away my young family and I were never stung. When I retired and had all the time in the world.....there was no excuse.

I started my first season in the spring of 2012 following the "Taster Course" run by Lesley Fancote and Peter Cox. I acquired two empty national hives, one of them a 14x12. 'A strong lad like you should go for 14x12' said Peter Cox. This made sense to me as I'd already learned and heard of 'brood and a half' and I didn't see the point of the extra manipulations which that

entailed. It wasn't long before I put an eke in the standard national brood box to convert that to 14x12 as well.

I then bought a nuc from Yalding Bee Fayre, a swarm promptly followed 7 days later; I wish I hadn't paid £140 for that nuc now!

I lost both hives in the winter of 2012/13 and so started from scratch in 2013. I just collected swarms and built up to four hives going into winter 2013/14; I didn't spend a penny on acquiring bees. I'd been studying the the pros and cons of all the different hives and had discussed this topic at length with Bob Smith, two bee farmers and other experienced beekeepers. As I built up to my four colonies during the summer of 2013 I decided that I would try a Langstroth hive and compare the pros and cons into the spring of 2014.

2014 was the year everything kicked off. All 4 colonies survived the winter and the one that did extremely well and developed the quickest and strongest was the Langstroth crew. It was as Bob Smith had said to me: '*the bees just seem to like a Langstroth*'.

There are many debateable reasons for this, but I do believe it to be true. Decision made, I made DIY converters and put Langstroth brood boxes on top of my 14x12s to entice the Queens into the Langstroth. This worked very well, but at one point (largely because I didn't know what I was doing) I had 11 colonies on the go. I removed the 14x12 brood boxes once the Queens were in the Langstroths and put them to one side, only for the little blighters to raise new Queens and before I knew it the 14x12's were growing again!

Fate stepped in and my Postman asked if I'd like to put a hive in someone's garden. He introduced us and when I saw the garden of a couple of acres of flowers I had difficulty

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curbing my enthusiasm when the owner asked if it would be OK for me to put a hive there. One of the 14x12's was immediately transferred to a new home."

Club activities

"I maintain the club website, including news and events. I took the Basic exam and passed in the summer 2014. I put my twisted arm up to take on the role of Education Co-ordinator for the branch at the last AGM.

There is always something to learn or get on with, even in the winter, and my number one tip for other beekeepers is 'Read books' - not just the study type but the amusing anecdotal ones too (it can't be serious all the time). Check out everything you can about bees, look at 'stuff' on the internet about bees and most importantly.....listen to and learn from other beekeepers.

2014 was a good year for me, but I still made lots of mistakes around swarm control and while splitting colonies. I learned a lot and managed to get my first reasonable crop of honey. I feel better prepared and know a bit more about where I want to be going in 2015. My aim is to build on what I've learned using Langstroths, and get all my colonies on double brood boxes. I may keep two National 14x12s in my 'out apiary' to really study the pro's and con's of both types of hive. I will be preparing to take the General Husbandry assessment, probably in 2016, and would like to develop the Education Co-ordinator role within the association.

You can contact Peter via the club website:
<http://www.kentbee.com/gravesend/>

Or via phone/email:
Tel: 01474 823563
Mobile 07712431099
Email: smith.p.l@btinternet.com

Some photos from the club's visit to Peter's hives in Higham last summer.....



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2015 Meetings Programme

March 22 Sunday	Cobham Hall 2.30	Collecting swarms	David Rea Sidcup
April 12 Sunday	Cobham Hall 2.30	Integral Queen rearing & swarm control	Bob Smith
May 2 Saturday	Cobham 11.00	Munchies in the Meadow Club stand	Volunteers welcome
May 10 or 17 Sunday	Cobham apiary 2.30	Disease control & Apiary inspection	Brian McCullum (TBC)
May 10 or 17 Sunday	Cobham apiary From 2pm	Working Party	All members
June to July Sunday	Cobham Apiary	Weekly hive inspections* including occasional guests, eg Peter Allen	All members
August 16 Sunday	Cobham Apiary	Extraction day	All members
September ?? Sunday	Location TBC	Branch BBQ	All members
October ?? Sunday	Cobham Hall 2.30	Winter preparation	Peter Cox TBC
November 15 TBC		Branch AGM	All members

From May through August, meetings will be held outside in the apiary, weather permitting, and the focus will be on practical skills; early (Mar/Apr) and late (Sep/Oct) season meetings will be more theoretical and take place in the Cobham Hall Activity Centre

*Hive inspections will take place at the Cobham apiary on Sundays based on pre-arranged a rota, but all members are welcome to turn up and join in. More details available from Michelle (01474 356231 m. 07734467410).