

## KENT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

### Orpington Branch Newsletter February 2008

An extremely select number of our members turned up for the Bromley talk (actually, two). There weren't all that many Bromley members either, but it was a cold dark evening and it had been raining all day so it wasn't all that surprising. About half of those attending were female so maybe they can cope with the conditions better than their male colleagues.

Peter Tomkin had spent a long time at Rothamsted working with bees but had started beekeeping at the age of sixteen. In 1947 he was looking after hives including one called a Gogol which was a horizontal hive containing 21 Dadant frames, so horizontal hives are not new. He seems to have kept detailed records of his beekeeping over the years and is therefore well able to know what is best for the bees. The following are some of his recommendations:

Too many hives too close together are bad for bees.

Overcrowding in the hive can lead to stress and a risk of disease.

Bigger hives lead to bigger swarms.

A super beneath the brood box gives extra space and can be a potential nucleus (it remains during the winter)

Avoid over-manipulation since bees get crushed – maybe only look at 2-3 frames at the centre.

Change as many frames as possible in the spring.

Don't move frames from one hive to another – you may be spreading disease.

Don't unite into a weak colony – why is it weak?

If you find queen cells, do an artificial swarm.

Take off honey in July – any after that the bees can have, but feed candy in winter if necessary.

Clip the queen as part of swarm prevention.

Use queens that you have produced.

Over the years, following the above has resulted in his losses going down but honey production going up.

Nevertheless there have always been years of heavy losses and that is not unusual.

I don't think everyone would agree with all his suggestions.

Our next meeting is on Wednesday February 20<sup>th</sup> at 8.00pm at Atomwide. Mavis Righini will be talking about her hedgehog sanctuary. Please let Mandy know you are coming so that there is enough food.

Saturday March 22<sup>nd</sup> is the opening day for the Beeche Centre and we have been invited to set up a stand in the building. Jim knows all about it and would welcome offers of help for the day. This will be a wonderful way to advertise our presence nearby.

I believe the working party went well and the weather was lovely but very cold.

An important announcement for anyone who is planning to go to the National Honey Show this year – the date and place are both changed. It will now be from October 30<sup>th</sup> to November 1<sup>st</sup> at St. Georges College, Addlestone, Surrey (just off Junction 11 of the M25). The Thursday is a half day, the Friday and Saturday are full days.

A headline in the "Sunday Telegraph" on January 20<sup>th</sup> read "Honeybees may be wiped out in 10 years say keepers". This is reported to have come from the BBKA who want the government to restart shelved research programmes and fund new ones to try to save the insects. The article includes "Last year more than 11% of all beehives inspected were wiped out, although losses were higher in some areas. In London, about 4000 hives – two-thirds of the bee colonies in the capital – were estimated to have died over last winter. Of the eight colonies inspected so far this year, all have been wiped out". I don't know whether these figures are correct or exaggerated. BBKA are unlikely to be successful since a Defra spokesman said "... the BBKA must realize that Defra, in common with the whole of the public sector, has finite resources". The resources of Defra are more finite than they need have been if they had not been so incompetent in failing to pay the farmers and incurring a fine of £300M (?) from Europe.

It will be interesting to see how our stocks come through a winter which has been pretty mild so far.

Frank