

KENT BEEKEEPERS` ASSOCIATION

Orpington Branch Newsletter July 2004

An email from Alan Byham, the Regional Bee Inspector, reports that pyrethroid-resistant varroa have been found at an apiary in Sandwich, Kent. This news was also included in the latest edition of "Beecraft". The beekeeper had done everything according to the rules and since there is no known link to other incidents it shows that resistance can arise even when you have treated the hives correctly. He states "It is vitally important that beekeepers look for signs of resistance in their own colonies – either by monitoring varroa population size after treatment with pyrethroid strips or by using a resistance field test kit". I have details of the test recommended by the National Bee Unit if you would like it. Further information and advice is available from the Bee Inspectors or at www.nationalbeeunit.com.

You should also be using other non-chemical treatments, such as drone cell trapping, to keep varroa levels down, and possibly the other non-pyrethroid chemicals based on thymol.

Our stand at Coolings was well supported by our members and well visited by members of the public who had really come to buy plants. I understand that sales of honey were up on last year and a number of people expressed an interest in beekeeping. Tony Trinick will be following up these enquiries in the hope that we can increase our membership. This year, Gordon Harradine had produced a honey sampler similar to a soap dispenser and I am sure this contributed to the rise in honey sales.

The observation hive is always a great attraction on the stand but its presence is due entirely to the efforts of Jim Grierson. Early on the morning of the first day he has to transfer suitable combs, including the queen, from his hive into the observation hive and transport it to the show. At the end of the show he has to put them back into their hive. Without his help I am sure we would have fewer visitors.

The demonstration at Kit's apiary was also well attended and even included someone who had only found out about our activities from a tiny paragraph in that week's "News Shopper". Although Kit warned us that his bees were a bit aggressive, on the day they seemed very docile. Someone suggested that they enjoyed having an audience! Kit's hives are sited in a dense forest of tall trees with underlying shrubs which gives a low level of lighting and makes seeing eggs difficult. One comment made to me was "I don't know how the bees manage to find their way back to the hive". Needless to say, Kit and Helen provided us with a sumptuous tea on their patio afterwards.

The next beekeeping event is the Kent Show at Detling and I hope some of you will be able to enter some of the classes. Entries must be in by Friday July 9th and the show is on Friday - Sunday July 16-18th. I have schedules and entry forms.

Howls of laughter were heard in the House of Commons when an openly-gay Government Minister started to extol the virtues of queens from Greece and Slovenia, having unfortunately forgotten to include the word "bees"!

Peter Kirby found two articles of interest in newspapers: The first read "A lorry overturned on a highway in Bear Trap Canyon, Montana, spilling its load of bee hives. Some nine million honey bees swarmed furiously as the driver, Lane Miller, escaped. He injured his arm, suffered bruises and was stung about 20 times. 'I've never felt so much fear in my life' said Mr. Miller". I guess they can't have been Africanised bees. As Peter said "How do you get nine million bees back into their hives?"

The second refers to research at the University of California, San Diego, which showed that bees sniff out the chemical markers left by other colonies to guide them back to food and seize it for themselves. Once the "tracker" agents have discovered the route taken by a competing colony they return to their hive to summon up reinforcements. The bees then swarm to the food source, killing or driving away their rivals. Although this might be typical of the bad behaviour of American bees, I am sure that our "British" bees would never stoop to such underhand tactics!

Don't forget to make sure that your honey complies with the new regulations that come into force on August 1st (see "Beecraft" for February)

Frank