

KENT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

Orpington Branch Newsletter May 2007

Honeybees continue to make headlines in the papers with the reports of dead or vanished colonies. The honey crop this year will be reduced and fruit growers may find it difficult to obtain hives for pollination. Radiation from mobile 'phones has now been suggested as the cause but it seems very unlikely that people have been using them near our hives at the apiary.

The bee inspection has taken place and no foul brood disease was found. What was found was severe varroa infestation in some hives, which at this time of year is an especially serious problem. The mild winter has been ideal for varroa. There must have been very few periods when the queen wasn't laying and with brood continually present there was the probability of a big build up of mites. Possibly also, the mites that were treated with Apistan or Bayvarol last autumn were already resistant.

So it looks as though we have to say goodbye to our friendly pyrethroid strips and try to deal with varroa in a different way. You could try "Apiguard" which is said to be quite effective, and certainly continue drone trapping. Two other techniques were recommended by Nick Withers during the bee inspection. The first is the shook swarm procedure, which is regarded as good practice anyway, and the other is queen trapping. He said that you can buy the cage for the frame containing the queen, but it is best to take along a frame since there is variation in frame sizes. Nick emphasized that accurate timing is necessary for queen trapping to be successful.

Once again, Alan provided an excellent lunch in beautiful surroundings. Many thanks, Alan.

I've just received my first 'phone call about a swarm – at least it shows that there are still some colonies confident enough about the future!

At long last it seems that building of the new nature hut is about to start and we will find out whether there are any problems in looking after our bees at the Apiary. However, the Chairman at the Downe Residents' Association AGM in March said that the final plans had yet to be published and that it was to be called the Bromley Environmental Education Centre at High Elms (BEECHE). Residents are concerned about the change in emphasis and the risk of coaches and traffic in their village.

Did you see the pictures in the "Daily Telegraph" colour supplement of the hives specially made for the roof of Fortnum and Mason's? "There are four different designs: classical, gothic, Indian and Chinese. All are made from oak with copper-clad roofs,gilded finials (to catch the light) and finished with a coat of Fortnum's signature colour, eau de nil. The classical hive features triumphal arches, the gothic boasts ogee arches and the Chinese and Indian hives reflect the trade Fortnum's was doing in the 18th century." The price of each hive is £1500. I hope the beekeeper is a strong chap because they are likely to be rather heavy. I also hope that the bees will appreciate their high quality home because they have to produce some rather special honey to justify the selling price of £10 for a half-pound jar.

Our next activity is the May Fair at Petts Wood where we will have a stand. Can anyone let us have some honey to sell? We will be setting up the stand at about 9.30. I hope there is a good attendance to the show, because it was originally not going to take place and I haven't seen any advertising posters about it. Fingers crossed!

Then on Saturday 19th May we will be demonstrating beekeeping on the Nature Trail at Coolings in Main Road, from 1-3pm. Spare bee suits are needed so that interested passers-by can get involved safely.

Finally, don't forget the Apiary Club AGM at the Apiary on Saturday June 2nd.

Frank