

## KENT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

### Orpington Branch Newsletter November 2004

The National Honey Show this year was at the Royal Air Force Museum at Hendon which, for us, is rather remote on the other side of London. Generously, Gordon Harradine gave Jim Grierson and I a lift in his car and so he was the one who had to battle it out on the North Circular. I would have preferred it if the show could have stayed at Kensington Town Hall, but it was an expensive venue. On the other hand, it was a bonus to be able to look at the planes in the museum and see them close up; until you are close, you don't realise just how big they are. The museum is large too and this was somewhat emphasised by having the show at one end and the trade exhibits at the other with the lectures somewhere in between.

No one had told me that they were going to enter, so I was delighted to find members' names amongst the winners. Pride of place goes to Helen who achieved a First for her Small Honey Cakes, a Second for her Biscuits and was Highly Commended for her Sweets (don't forget, these are National classes). Also winners were Kit, with a Second for his Medium Honey and a Third for the Light, and Greg with a Second for his Gingerbread, Highly Commended for his Set Honey in two classes, and Commended for his Cut Comb – a class I don't remember anyone from the branch winning or even entering for many years. With this encouragement maybe we will have even more entries next year.

One item of beekeeping equipment that had been entered was a new arrangement of a hive. An aperture covered with queen excluder had been cut in the side of the brood box which did not have an entrance. A super alongside with an entrance had a corresponding hole in a side wall, so that the bees could pass through to the brood box. Additional supers were then added above the first. The advantage claimed for this is that inspections of the queen and brood can be carried out without having to lift off any supers and the risk of damage to one's back. I am not sure what the bees would think about this arrangement but if I understand it correctly it would appear to make swarms impossible except when you open up the brood chamber.

The only new thing I noticed in the Trade Stands (which seemed fewer in number than previously) was a Varro Vaporiser on the Thorne's stand. This is a small cup heated by electricity which contains oxalic acid crystals and is inserted through the hole in the entrance block. When heated, the crystals are vaporised and are deposited as a fine film on the bees and the surfaces of the hive. It is claimed that this is well tolerated by the bees, but is deadly to varroa. The heater needs a 12V supply and as it is rated at 150W, you need a car battery as well. At a price of £80 and about £7 for the crystals I think it unlikely that many beekeepers will buy it.

I am very interested in solitary bees and have had some blocks of wood with deep holes hanging on a shed. For the first couple of years these provided nesting sites for lots of solitary bees, but during last winter I noticed that all the entrances were partly open, instead of being sealed with mud. I found out one reason for this when I heard a tapping sound and found a woodpecker on the block. One of the lectures at the show was on solitary bees and this proved very interesting. With all the eggs laid along the depth of the hole, with a wall separating each, it wasn't obvious how they manage to emerge in turn. Eggs which will produce females are laid first, then the males and the males are the first to come out. Depending on the weather, there can be quite some time before the females emerge and during this period the males become frantic! Differently to honey bees, the females are much larger than the males. Since the main job of the bees is to collect pollen (they only need enough nectar for themselves) they are better pollinators than honey bees. Damp is a problem for the nests and the speaker recommended storing them during the winter in a dry place.

Don't forget our AGM and Harvest Supper on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> November at 8.00pm at the Petts Wood Memorial Hall and our Christmas Party on Saturday 11<sup>th</sup> December.

A reminder to Committee members - the next meeting is at 8.00pm on Friday November 12<sup>th</sup> at Kit's house.

Frank

PS. I am sorry to have to report the death of Gordon Dowson's wife, Joyce. The funeral is at St. Martins Church, Chelsfield, at 2.00pm on Friday November 5<sup>th</sup>.