

KENT BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

Orpington Branch Newsletter September 2006

You should by now have received your annual subscription reminder from Tony. The new beekeeping year starts on October 1st and it is a great help to him to receive the forms and subscriptions as soon as possible. If you are late you could miss out on "Beecraft".

As of last Saturday there were no signs of any building activity at the Nature Centre but one of the consequences of the continuing delay is that the area is becoming a wilderness with weeds growing unhindered. Once the new building is up there will be a lot of work needed before the area returns to a managed state. One potential benefit is that rabbits have been seen in our Apiary so we could finish up with the hives standing on a beautiful close-cropped lawn with the mower permanently out of use. Or am I being over-optimistic?

Jim tells me that there is still going to be an Apple Day this year to which we are invited and it will probably be held in a marquee in the main park. The date has not yet been fixed but is usually in the middle of October.

Jim has arranged to get a supply of Apistan, so if you have not already obtained your own, contact Jim. I hope you don't have pyrethroid resistant varroa!

Jim was also invited to the official opening of the demonstration hive at Down House and spoke to the Great....great grandson (I'm not sure how many greats) of Charles Darwin, who performed the ceremony. He was interested in our Apiary and may come to see us next year. He is likely to have some influence with Bromley Council and it would obviously be beneficial to us for him to support the continued existence of the Apiary. Fingers crossed!

A final reminder of the Honey Show on Saturday September 16th at the same place as last year. I have received a Schedule possibly because I was a bit involved in its production but I hope those of you intending to enter will also have one. If you haven't, let me know pretty quickly so I can rectify the situation. New classes for this year include one for Chunk Honey, microwave-only classes for confectionery and one for Honey Marmalade.

On Saturday September 2nd, Ashford are holding their Honey Show at Bilsington Priory. I have one schedule if someone wants it.

Rothamsted has an Open Weekend on September 30th and October 1st from 11am to 5pm each day. I went to one once and found it very interesting. Apart from their work on bees it is fascinating to see the extent of their investigations into aspects of agriculture many of which can have a direct bearing on bee populations. It is well within driving distance for a day trip.

If you happen to be in North Wales there is the Conwy Honey Fair on September 13th. An article in the August edition of "Country Living" which I saw in the dentist's gives the following information: A castle was built in 1283 after Edward 1's conquest of the Welsh king but the garrison could not survive without local goods. The king therefore decreed by Royal Charter that on specific dates Welsh traders could sell their wares within the town walls. Eleven fairs were allotted but of these all have lapsed except a Spring Seed Fair and the Honey Fair. The charter states that future rights to trade would cease if no traders turned up. It has been a close run thing in the past with only three honey sellers turning up in 1902, one in 1918, and two in 1982, but now the fair seems to be flourishing. If you don't happen to be in North Wales, then there is always next year, but would English honey be welcomed?

I have been reading a book entitled "The Hive" by Bee Wilson (John Murray 2004) which has a lot of information which was completely new to me. Did you know, for example, that in the patriarchal past the male bee was regarded as the king and the position of the queen bee was played down considerably. One writer said "It is not possible that a single bee.....could carry enough eggs to produce forty or fifty thousand little bees. Besides, it would be beneath the dignity of the queen to behave in this filthy way". It was a Dutchman who devoted himself to the newly invented microscope and developed tools for dissection and first established the sexual functions of the bee. But his discoveries did not reach the public until nearly sixty years after his death. The book contains a lot of unusual information and makes an interesting read. The author is not a beekeeper and writes on many subjects but the size of the bibliography shows that she has done her homework well.

Frank