

Surrey Beekeepers Association

CROYDON DIVISION

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www.croydonbeekeepers.co.uk



JULY 2011

DATES TO REMEMBER

APIARY MEETINGS

10 th. and 24 th. July, Sundays at 2 p.m. Hartley Down as usual
and even if it rains David Sheperd can show something on his computer in the hut.



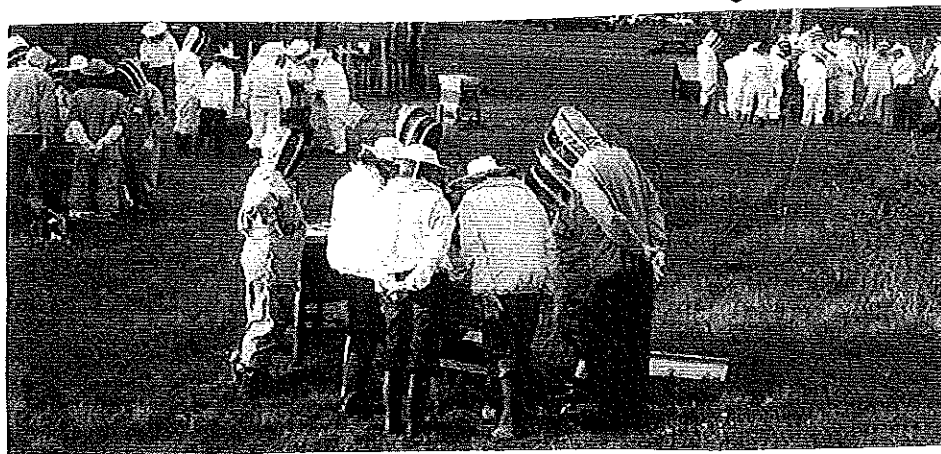
Somewhere else to go on Sundays?



There is tea and cakes after apiary meetings but not as refined as this.

REIGATE DIVISION'S NEW APIARY

As some of you know Reigate beekeepers have been able to purchase some land for a teaching apiary a mile or so North of Newdigate and have over the last year or so got it ready. Your chairman, Mark Stott, trustee, Rosemary Collett and Richard Snelling, our member who acts as auditor for the Surrey BKA were invited to the official opening of the apiary by Bill Turnbull on the 25 th. of last month and enjoyed a pleasant afternoon with refreshments, music by a violin and cello group and displays about the Surrey Hills, butterflies and bats. The latter was by the Bat Conservation Trust and many attending found this fascinating as the lady running the stand had six different sorts of bats, alive and held them so they could be seen close up, she even spread the wings of one out; so we saw some of the 17 species that live in Britain. After the ribbon cutting ceremony the afternoon continued with meeting old friends and beekeeping chats.



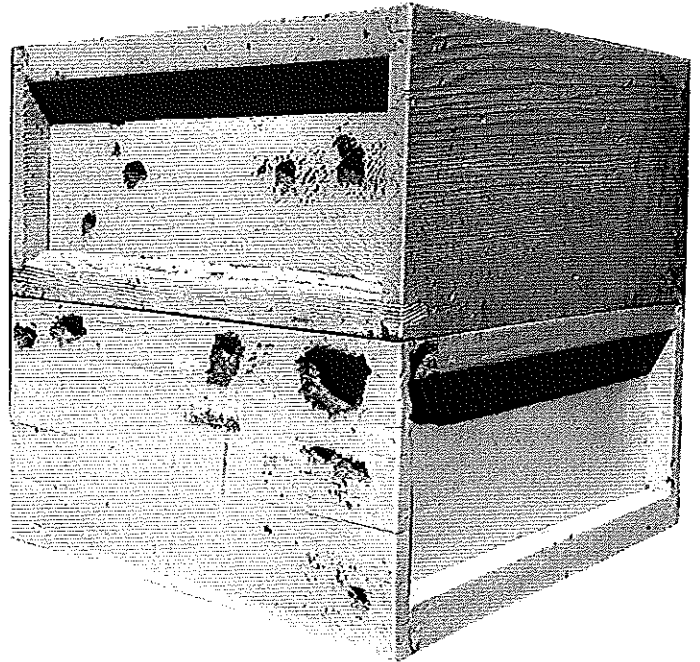
THE GREEN WOODPECKER

Ted Hooper in his book Guide to Bees and Honey tells that you may keep bees for years without damage then suffer hive break ins by this hansom bird. Until last year this was our experience, also at Hartley Down apiary where several hives were holed and one of our members there lost a colony as a result. This occurred when it was cold and we had a covering of snow.

The culprit and his 'work'



THE GREEN WOODPECKER.



HONEY SHOWING

Frank Castrique, one of our most successful showmen has provided the following hints for a couple of the classes in our honey show:

The Heaviest Frame

For anyone with bees this is the easiest class to enter. You need to start thinking about this soon (I know someone who has already selected his frame).

All you need is a super frame filled with honey - looks do not count. It is judged purely on weight. There can be wax in the wrong places, the surface can have hills and craters, it does not matter.

Look for a well filled frame and then give it plenty of space in the super so that the bees can fill it out. Have a go.

Tip : All debris etc included, everything including surplus wax, propolis and pollen. DO NOT CLEAN

F.C.

Combe for Extraction

This class is at the other end of the spectrum and the frame is usually exhibited in a transparent case.

Here are Frank's tips : The face of the combe should be flat and protrude beyond the edge of the frame so that it can easily be uncapped with a knife. When a light is applied to the back of the combe no pollen or crystals should be visible. The honey should be all the same colour, the combe should be fully capped (if possible) and all the same colour and not stained.

F.C.

Liquid honey

Winning the class for liquid honey at the National Honey Show requires true dedication. A past winner said he bought a box of 50 high quality jars, and rejected over 40 of them! The NHS is something quite exceptional, not matched elsewhere in the world. For us mere mortals, such extremes are not necessary, but extreme cleanliness is. Any speck of dirt or pollen grain will carry a penalty.

The first step is to read the rules of the show and adhere strictly to them. Type of jar and lid, labelling, entering the right class for light, medium or dark. If in doubt about this, find someone with the test slips and check according to the instructions.

Aroma and taste are given high marks by any good judge. They are subjective, so in a close contest there could be an element of luck, but the processing of the honey can have a big influence. High temperatures and unnecessary exposure to air degrade the honey to some extent, and should be avoided. So, how to proceed.

First, select a good-tasting batch of frames. A low water content is desirable, the judge will look for high viscosity. Ideally avoid the centrifuge and let enough honey drain out after uncapping. This will conserve aroma and avoid entraining a mass of tiny air bubbles which are the devil to eliminate. But if you find this impractical you will still have a chance after centrifuging.

The honey should be bright and clear, which means filtering with the finest mesh you can get. Allow the honey to stand long enough to let the bubbles rise to the surface, then fill your sparkling clean jars carefully to avoid more bubbles.

After a few days carefully inspect your selected jars. Shine a bright torch through the jar to be sure the honey has not started to crystallise - sometimes this process starts after a week or two, even though it may not be completed for months. This is annoying as it cannot be entered for naturally set honey perhaps until another year.

Remove the lid (and enjoy the smell) to check the surface of the honey. Shine the torch on the surface, and then shine the beam across the surface from side to side while looking at the surface from a low angle. You may be surprised and disappointed to see a dense mass of otherwise invisible bubbles on the surface. If this is the case, they have to be skimmed off as best you can, it is not easy. One way is to start with the jar just about full to the brim, as you will remove a lot of honey before you are done. You must be able to top up with (non-aerated) honey as necessary.

If really fine bubbles are not a problem but there are a few bigger ones, these are easily removed for example by just covering them with the tip of a knife and lifting them off.

You may have read the advice to take a clean lid to the show and changing to it before you put the jar on the show bench. This is very bad practice, you will not be penalised if there is unavoidably some honey on the inside of the lid, but you will have lost most of that desirable aroma, and probably have collected dust from the air in the room due to all the activity. Did I say that all processing must be in a dust-free room, if such a thing is possible. Good luck!

Tony Kirkby
August 2010

CUPS AND AWARDS

Last month I mentioned the N.T.Haines Cup, which is awarded to the Croydon member who is a novice showman or woman, who has not won a prize in our honey show before. Full details will be in the show schedule.

Thanks to Richard Palmer, who I believe is our longest standing member, and our archivist, Terry Stephensmith I can now tell something about Nigel Haines. He was a bank manager and lived near South Norwood Lake, High View Close. For the years 1952 and 1953 he was chairman of Croydon BKA, also Croydon's representative for Surrey BKA from 1953 to 1958, general and programme secretary from 1956 to 1964 besides being a visiting advisor. He was made an honorary member of Surrey BKA too. In 1964 he was married and moved to East Finchley but remained a Croydon member until 1987. Croydon Beekeepers subscribed to a clock on the occasion of his wedding.

Richard Palmer remembers helping Mr. Haines with his bees which were kept in the grounds of St. Joseph's College off Norbury Hill and that he put his bare hand on a frame of bees, moved his hand about and saying that if he could not do that he would not keep bees.



An inexpensive refractometer

A refractometer is a very useful instrument used for the measurement of the water content of honey. The water content must always be less than 20%, and preferably not more than 18%. If higher than 20%, the honey will almost certainly ferment making it very unpleasant and inedible. A beekeeper can usually make a reasonable judgement as to the water content being acceptable (the honey should not splash out when frames of unsealed or partially sealed honey are shaken), but sometimes an instrument that will measure it accurately is very good for peace of mind. In the past, a refractometer was very expensive; I purchased one about 15 years ago for nearly £100. However, they have been gradually coming down in price, but I was astonished to be shown one last week by one of our members, Vic Halliday. He obtained it from Hong Kong for only £18.70, including postage. It is not as heavy as my own, but looks very sound. When we tested it with some honey it indicated a water content of 16.6%, and my own instrument measured 16%. Both instruments claim an accuracy of $\pm 1\%$ but neither makes it clear whether this is 1% of the percentage reading or 1% water content (if it reads 15% does this mean the true answer could be $15\% \pm 0.15\%$, or 1% either side of 15%, ie 14% or 16%?) I wondered this 15 years ago but never got round to looking into it. Does anyone know the answer? At all events, this refractometer appears to be a good buy. For full details, go the Gain Express Holdings website.

Thanks to Vic for bringing this to our attention. -Ed.

Best bar none

Last night, 300 guests celebrated St George's Day at Spy's exclusive party at Nell's Bar in Mayfair. Among the revellers was Anthony Richards, the proud winner of my competition to provide the best 50-word definition of Englishness. And here is his poem, titled *Englishness*:

*He views the Channel
as a trench/ Laughs at the
Germans, hates the French/
Though docile on his starchy
diet/ He'll rush abroad to quell
a riot./ He hates a fuss, seldom
complains/ Accepts poor
service and late trains./ But
full of ale there's hell to pay -/
Remember that on St George's
Day.*

NATURENOTES

'Bee-friendly' Boris wants city buzzing

Bee hives will be installed in cemeteries and on roof gardens in an attempt to help the insects thrive in London.

The new drive by Boris Johnson, the mayor, will offer hives, equipment and training to help communities set up a thriving bee colony. His office is also offering advice to households on what they can do to help bees, such as planting lavender in window boxes.

The campaign, part of a programme called Capital Growth, is designed to boost the number of both honey bees and bumble bees after years of decline. Despite there being fewer plants than in countryside habitats, bees can thrive in cities because there is a greater variety of flora in gardens.

Mr Johnson said a healthy bee population was all part of his plans for a greener London. "I want London to boast a great quality of life, making it an attractive place to live, work and visit," he said. "Protection of our environment is an important part of this."

"My 'bee-friendly' pledge is to zealously safeguard our green spaces. As part of this, we are supporting the development of 50 new community bee hives to create sanctuaries for the urban bee."