



DECEMBER NEWSLETTER

Hello Members,

December isn't ordinarily the most action packed month in the beekeeping calendar but as you'll know if you're on the club's whatsapp group, it's certainly been an interesting time for apiary manager Michelle and assistant apiary manager Gary! Having had their apiary invaded and a hive destroyed by a wayward ram, they thought their problems were over once the ram had been moved on and the hive repaired but this turned out not to be the case. The very next day Gary returned and found the wayward ram back and intent on reprising his role as 'the apiary menace', Gary, very much the Luke Skywalker of the piece (a long stick replacing the lightsaber) ended up with an injured leg and damage to his vehicle (pictures below) but with the help of the RSPCA the menace was finally dealt with. What a nightmare!



In other news this month the AGM was well attended by some 20 members with several apologies (including yours truly!). The committee was re-elected but still searching for enthusiastic members who'd like to take part. If you are interested in joining the committee then please let me or Lesley know. Per the whatsapp group the winners of this year's honey tasting competition were as follows:

1st Place - Sue Payne

2nd Place - Tony Warren

3rd Place - Lesley Fancote joint with Michelle Elliott.

In light of overall poor honey crops last year it was decided at the AGM that the honey jar order would be postponed this year. Most people seem to have plenty left from last year and the club still has plenty in stock. Please do contact Lesley if you have the need for jars/lids etc.



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Member Profile - Tony Warren

This month, member Tony Warren volunteered to be profiled, Tony was incredibly generous with his time and it was an absolute joy to visit his home and talk bees, Slovenian bee houses and Asian Hornet tracking dogs.

Tony first became interested in becoming a beekeeper following a holiday to Slovenia where he encountered Slovenian bee-houses. As the season is so short in Slovenia and them having a relatively cold climate the bees are kept in specially designed houses that are designed to keep the bees insulated and allow work to be carried out on the colonies under cover using AZ hives. The idea of the curved wall leading to the roof is to help circulate warm air. While the operation of attending to the bees is perhaps slightly elongated, working at waist height while sheltered inside does have it's advantages even in a moderate climate like the UK, I can imagine it making beekeeping much more accessible for very frail or disabled people.

When covid hit and the country was thrown into lockdown Tony decided he wanted to build his own Slovenian bee-house right here in Gravesend. He'd acquired a private patch of land behind his home which he'd already begun to transform into a wildlife area and this was to be the site for the beehouse. It's a wonderful spot thats totally hidden from passers by and I could imagine retreating there myself and enjoying the calm following a stressful day. The building was made by Tony from images on the internet and holiday memories and the AZ hives were imported from Slovenia. The following are some photos I took during my visit along with an image of a Solvenian beehouse in Slovenia.





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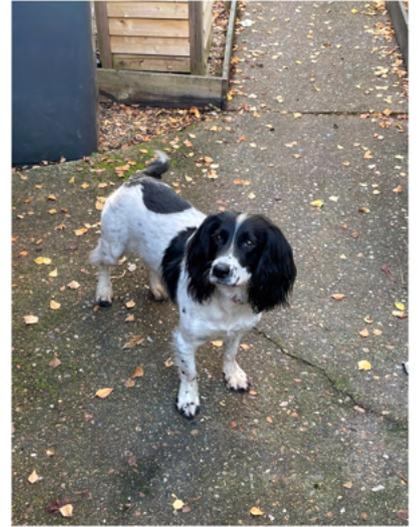
As if the Slovenian bee-house wasn't interesting enough, Tony is also a dog handler and owner of a scent dog. When not assisting the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish Police forces to track bodies and other unpleasant things, he's hunting Asian hornet nests in Jersey with the Jersey beekeepers association. Trials with his dog have so far been very successful (the dog has managed to find the nest from three different directions) and it's only a matter of time before the problem becomes so severe that there aren't enough people and hours to trace all of the nests and so then the dog become the 'go to' method for doing so. It was really interesting hearing about Tony's approach to the problem of what scent he should train the dog to follow. After much discussion and deliberation, it was decided that the dog should be trained using the nest material itself as the hornets could obviously be anywhere and harm the dog, the detritus/poo didn't tend to be concentrated around the nest sites and the grubs themselves rot over time and so the smell of a fresh grub would vary hugely from a dead 'training' grub. Here are some photos of my visit:



Tony keeps a section of Asian hornet nest in his 'beeshed freezer' to assist with scent tracking.



Crumbled nest material in a stocking that's hung from a tree during training.



The wonderdog!

Tony has very kindly offered to run a demonstration with the dog should members be interested, if you'd like to attend an event of this sort please let me know so we can start making arrangements. Similarly, Tony needs volunteers to help with training as it's imperative he can be sure that the dog isn't just following his scent when hanging the dummy nest in a given tree, so again if you are interested please let me know so I can pass your details along.

All that remains to say is if you'd like to be part of the newsletter please let me know by replying to the newsletter email gbkanews@gmail.com and other than that to wish you all a safe and Merry Christmas!