

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

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EDITORIAL



Asian hornet on Jersey. Photo: Ray Jones

No apologies for this rather engaging portrait of an Asian hornet, captured by a beekeeper on Jersey. It's possibly a new queen, as it was not only hairy and therefore young, but found trying to fly but not succeeding, and so may have just rolled or fallen out of the nest.

The relevance? In September, one full secondary AH nest was discovered in Essex and subsequently destroyed, while another individual was discovered in October near Dover.

This is the time of year that the new queens will be emerging from their nests—if there are any—and looking for places to hibernate. They will be big and should be easy to spot. Here in Sussex, we are in the front line and need to keep an eye out...

Dead bees? Let Bob sort you out

Our second full meeting of the winter season was headed by an engaging talk from Bob Smith, Chairman of the science-oriented Central Association of Beekeepers.

He spoke about the beekeeping annual cycle and what beekeepers needed to do at each stage. You'll find more about his talk elsewhere in the newsletter, but let's say that some of the points he made raised an eyebrow or two among some of his audience.

Meetings

We've now finalised our winter calendar, so please flip over to the back page where the details are revealed in their full glory. Thanks to Meetings Secretary Bob Curtis for his efforts in pulling this together.

Transparency at B&L

Did you know that we publish the committee minutes online? This was a decision we made some time ago in the interests of transparency, allowing any member to see what we're discussing. So if you'd like to know more about what's going in B&L and what's coming up, please head straight to the website's [members' area](#).

There's lots more there too, including every previous newsletter, so if you need it, there's our history at your fingertips.

Manek Dubash, Editor

NEWSLETTER NOVEMBER 2022

EVENTS

- Meetings and more
- See [back page](#) for details

NEXT MONTH

- AGM/Honey show edition
- Seasonal hints & tips
- News updates
- Latest events
- Asian hornet update

SHARE YOUR PHOTOS AND STORIES

Do you have interesting photos or video links you'd like to share? Or an insight from your beekeeping that would could enhance the hobby for others? Do you have skills that could be useful to other members? Anything else you'd like to see in this newsletter?

Ideas and contributions welcome; all contact details are on the [back page](#).

ONLINE

 [B&L website](#)
 [Facebook](#)



QR link to our website

Seasonal tips for November

By now you will have tucked your bees up for the winter and they will be left to their own devices until the spring.

There's not much to do around the bees, except for the odd visit to check on whether they are upright after a storm, need a bit of additional feeding with fondant or some other mixture to supplement their stores, or later in December or January to carry out an oxalic acid varroa treatment. For most of the time from now until March you will be spending a considerable amount of time in your Garage/Shed/Store/Kitchen/Doghouse cleaning, repairing, and building kit.

Cleaning up

By far the biggest task for me is cleaning frames and dealing with the wax. Are the frames and wax in good condition? They could be at least five years old by now if it is the first time they have resurfaced, and even older if they have already been reused.

"Five years" you ask? Year one; made up from a kit and had foundation fitted. Year two; spent most of its time on the outside of the brood nest and only drawn out on one side. Year Three-Five; moved into the centre of the hive where it was continually used to raise

brood and now the wax is as black as sin. Yes, five years.

Wax assessment

The first job is to assess the wax in the frame:

- Clean, still yellow, and little used: Freeze the whole frame, if possible, to kill off any wax moth eggs and larvae then store for reuse next season.
- Damaged and little used wax: cut out and reclaim.
- Looks like it been stuck up a chimney for years: cut out and throw it away. We have all been in the position of saying, "I'm sure there's some wax in there". Wrong. Most of it is propolis, old cocoon sheaths and rubbish. You'll end up with a heap of sludge for a teaspoonful of wax.

Frame assessment

Next on the list are frames that have had the wax removed. Are they sound? Are there bits missing or have the wax moth larvae chewed their way through the bottom bars and made them into some delicate filigree? Hate it when that happens.

Once all the damaged bits have been removed, they will need cleaning. Once

clean replace the missing parts with new or reclaimed and clean parts.

Those cleaning frames fall into four camps:

- Manually scrape off all the wax and propolis then scorch with a blow torch. Not such a bad job if you only have a few to do.
- Submerge them, a boiling solution of washing soda and water for five-ten minutes. You'll need a large tea urn like a 10L Burco or similar. Then rinse them in cold water and let them dry. Make sure you do both ends of the frame.
- Put the whole frame, including the wax comb, into a steam wax melter for about ten -fifteen minutes. Two jobs at once, melted wax and steam sterilised frames
- Bin the whole lot and start from scratch. If you have an open fire they make good firelighters. Or you could use £5 notes, whatever you prefer *[won't work with plastic ones! Ed.]*.

Melting wax

Above, I've glibly mentioned two processes, wax melting and using a steam wax melter, that may be a little alien to some of my newer readers.

(Continued on page 3)



Old black comb: re-use or junk?



Abelo steam wax melter

Seasonal tips for November (continued)



10-litre boiler: ideal for frame cleaning

Melting wax is very straightforward. Take a large old saucepan or cooking pot and fill with about 50-75mm of rainwater. In East Sussex, where I live, tap water has calcium salts in it and will spoil the finish of the wax. Bring the water to a very gentle simmer and start adding your bits of wax. Take care when heating wax, it is flammable, but it must reach at least 70°C to sterilise it.

Once all the wax has melted, pour the contents into a plastic bucket and let it cool. When cool, the wax will have formed a hard sheet on top of the water with a layer of detritus on the bottom.



A Bain-Marie makes a good wax melter. Just don't cook anything in it afterwards! Commercial version on the left, DIY (bought second-hand) on the right.

Scrap off the detritus and sell the cleaned block of wax back to one of the many equipment wholesalers in exchange for new foundation.

However, if you want to make really clean wax for showing, making wax wraps, cosmetics or candles, then repeat the melting process two or three times and instead of scraping the resulting rubbish off, strain the wax through fine material (eg old tights, pillowcases or muslin) each time to remove any impurities.

If you are doing any of these processes in your kitchen, clear it with the management [*says the man! Ed.*] and cover everything in newspaper and dustsheets first.

Steaming

A steam wax melter may seem an extravagance but it can save you a lot of time if you have lots of frames to clean. Commercially available melters usually consist of a large metal drum with an outlet on one side and a steam inlet on the other.

Inside the drum is a smaller mesh drum. Whole frames and/or wax is put in the smaller mesh drum and steam is passed into the larger drum from an external steam generator (usually a wallpaper stripper). Water and wax drip out of the open outlet and the rubbish is collected in the mesh drum.

DIY wax melter

My melter works on the same principle, but the outer drum is a brood or super box depending on the frames I'm cleaning. The mesh drum is an open mesh floor (OMF) with the entrance

blocked up. The box is sealed by a shallow roof which has had a hole drilled in the top. The hole is big enough to take the end of the steam wallpaper stripper hose.

The wallpaper stripper was bought for use on other DIY jobs about the house. The OMF sits in a large square plastic tray and catches all of the melted wax and water and the OMF catches all the rubbish. Job done. Not one for the kitchen, best done in the garage or outside.

Of course, you can do these jobs at any time of the year, but you've got time now and actually it's easier to deal with some of these cleaning jobs now the temperature is lower and the wax and propolis has started to harden. It's amazing how sticky propolis is even at 18°C.

Another advantage of doing these jobs at this time of year is that you will not be surrounded by bees and/or wasps which will be attracted to the smell of warm wax and honey. Which is what usually happens to me when I'm trying to do something in the garage during the summer.

I know I've not mentioned other hive parts, but I will in my next column.

A Veiled Beekeeper Production





Graham Bubloz
Chairman

Words from the Chair

Seriously: help, please!

My pleas for someone to help in the role of communications office / secretary seem to have fallen on deaf ears. Please, please consider offering your help and contact me if you might be able to assist.

Many of you will be aware, but just in case you're not, our Treasurer and Membership Secretary Norman Dickinson suffered a heart attack in September. He is fine now and is taking things a little easier, but I ask that you bear that in mind if you need to contact him.

Events

The winter programme of events is near-complete, and we have some great talks coming up. Please keep an eye on our website and the back page of this newsletter for the latest details.

In addition to the monthly meetings held at Lewes (or via Zoom) we arrange occasional meetings called **Bee Chat** where we gather at various venues (usually [*invariably? Ed.*] a pub) and have a bit of a chinwag about bees. The next one is at The Roebuck Inn, Laughton on Thursday 23

November from 7.30pm onwards. You're more than welcome to attend—just show up.

Honey Show

By the time the newsletter gets published, the National Honey Show will have just taken place. If you went, I hope that you had a great time. I was unable to make it myself this year, but I know that it is usually a great place to pick up some bargains and attend some excellent lectures.

Bulk purchases

In October, you will have received an email from me giving you advanced notice of some bulk purchases that are being organised by Tony Birkbeck. Tony has gone to some effort to negotiate some good deals and I hope that you can take advantage of them.

Christmas meal

Finally, my thanks to Jude New for agreeing to organise a Christmas meal in the Hassocks area for B&L. If you haven't yet booked (and it may already be too late to do so) – but please [contact Jude](#).



Manek Dubash
Asian Hornet
Team Co-ordinator

Asian hornet latest

As I mentioned in the editorial on the front page, Asian hornets (*Vespa velutina nigrithorax*) are continuing to try and make the UK mainland their home.

Global warming continues to make the UK an increasingly cosy home for these insects, while the post-pandemic increase in cross-Channel traffic—both personal and commercial—acts as convenient transport.

Their effects on French beekeepers, where the beasts have become endemic almost throughout the country, varies.

Judging by a discussion on an Asian hornet Facebook page, some have said that they take measures to deal with them, from trapping, to swatting (surprisingly effective), to electrification using a harp-like device in front of the hives.

Others are resigned to putting up with them, and cluster their hives so that the bees can take action themselves. There is talk that some colonies have adopted tactics similar

to those of *Apis cerana*—Asian honey bees who have co-evolved with *V. velutina*—such as balling the hornets, effectively heating the predators to death.

As I understand it, little official action is being taken to attack the hornet head-on, such as the nest tracking and destruction methodologies being honed on Jersey, where the latest 2022 nest discovery count is well over 160. In France, though, the hornet is too well-established and the problem too big for that sort of effort to work.

Rather, researchers, such as [Eric Darrouzet](#), are looking for ways of using the hornet's lifecycle against it. This includes examining how it operates and what it eats, for example. I get the sense though that this research is still at the evidence-gathering stage.

Which means that our vigilance is all the more valuable: we cannot let the Asian hornet obtain a foothold here.

Barcombe apiary report

I forgot to mention last month that I made a special trip to Barcombe in September to inform the bees that the Queen had passed away. They seemed grateful for the information and immediately stopped investigating me; I hope you all told your bees too!

That said, I can't believe how quickly the season has gone this year; and when I look back I can't believe how much has been achieved at the apiary—from numerous splits, merges, re-queening 'lively' colonies, a visit from the bee inspector along with numerous apiary days for our members—hedge cutting, grass mowing, tree trimming, shed cleaning and of course a honey crop sold at Rottingdean fair.

Barcombe goes into winter with five strong colonies. All of these have now been treated for varroa with Apiguard and have been fed to build up their stores, all have brood in all stages (BIAS) following a brood break while I was treating (which is always worrying).



Members of the WhatsApp group B&L Buzz will know that I don't really support putting any supers back on under the brood box (nadir) for winter. That's because I will be treating for varroa again around Christmas (using oxalic acid sublimation) and I don't want the oxalic acid to engulf the frames in the super. So all the colonies are now reduced to one brood box and protected from the winter dampness by a wrapping of roofing membrane—see the photo below. You can get this

from Screwfix/Toolstation or any builders' merchant.

I feel ahead of myself, as I have also cleaned all the equipment and old boxes which are now stored securely.

Now the only thing I have left to do between now and next spring is to put on fondant and apply the oxalic acid.

To be honest I'm looking forward to the rest as it's been hectic over the last few months!

Tony Birkbeck, Apiary Manager

Second winter meeting generates a bit of controversy



Bob Smith, Chairman, Central Association

Oh dear, my bees have died again; what did I do, what can I do?

Bob Smith, Chairman of the Central Association of beekeepers, gave an

engaging talk, the second meeting of the winter season, under this heading, with about 40 members in attendance.

Bob described how he looked after his bees using methods developed over the years, at each stage of the season.

He laid out some suggested things to do at this time of year, particularly planning for 2023.

This might include thinking about queen rearing and bee improvement, increasing the number of colonies, and which of the existing colonies might need new comb.

At this time of year, he said, the key is to have lots of healthy bees with varroa numbers minimised, plenty of stores, and good hive protection against weather, mice, woodpeckers and other pests.

Questions to Bob after his talk included methods of applying acetic

acid to eliminate wax moth in stored comb, and the efficacy of using varroa boards as a method of assessing the numbers of mites in the hive.

This then generated some discussion around Bob's talk, much of which ended up on the WhatsApp group B&L Buzz. If you're not a member of this group, please feel free to [contact Jude New](#), who will add you to it.

B&L's Barcombe Apiary Manager Tony Birkbeck commented on WhatsApp after the meeting: "I thought that was a really good talk from Bob last night, albeit some of the stuff controversial (eg only treating half the colonies, feeding syrup in winter and not using fondant)."

Next meeting is on 16 November—all about beekeeping in Uzbekistan.

Manek Dubash

Bee finger!



B&L beekeeper Sam Acford shows off a bee happily sitting on his finger. Photo: Sam Acford (from a B&L Buzz video)



B&L events 2022/23

Winter meetings 2022/3

All winter in-person meetings start at 7.15 for a 7.30pm prompt start, at Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Eastgate Street, Lewes BN7 2LR. Links for online meetings—marked Zoom—will be sent out before the meeting.

Date	Speaker(s)	Topic
16 Nov	Stephen Allen-Tidy	Beekeeping in Uzbekistan
13 Dec	Everyone	All-members' Christmas dinner (contact Jude)
14 Dec	Lynne Ingram	The truth about honey (Zoom)
18 Jan	Anund Helgesen	Hints and tips from a Norwegian beekeeper (Zoom)
15 Feb	-	AGM & Honey Show
15 Mar	Nigel Kermode	The social side of beekeeping
19 Apr	TBA	TBA

Deadlines

Please send all contributions for the newsletter, **including photos**, to the Editor (details on right). Max. length: 500 words.

Copy deadline: 18th of the month before the publication date (except December: 11th). Email photos etc. for the website to Webmaster Gerald Legg (details on right).

Publication date: 25th of the month.

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Disclaimer

The Brighton and Lewes Division of the SBKA cannot accept any responsibility for loss, injury or damage sustained by persons in consequence of their participation in activities arranged by the Division.



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