

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

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EDITORIAL



Nicot queen rearing kit

They say that repetition is the best way of learning things. As someone who's suddenly realised that he's not longer quite in the full flush of youth, learning has become annoyingly difficult. But thanks to our training co-ordinator Jude New and to talks such as the excellent presentation by High Weald BKA's Malcolm Wilkie at the last open meeting—a [report of which you'll find on page 5](#)—I'm starting to feel that I may have understood how this queen rearing process could work.

I say 'could work' because I have zero experience, or at least none that has led to the desired outcome of a mated queen, so I'm looking forward to Jude's queen rearing course—which will take place just a few days after writing this editorial.

In the meantime, you might like to start thinking about what you want to do with your bees this year. Expansion to more than a handful of hives, perhaps, which

could be easier than you think since finding somewhere to put them is unlikely to be difficult. Just call a few local farms and ask. Or walk/drive around your local area and eyeball some likely sites.

Also in this issue, I've [highlighted the key ways of identifying Asian hornets](#), as any hibernating queens will be emerging this month and their nests, if you look up in your sheds and garages, will be easy to spot and easy to nip in the bud. Look up!

I'd hope that you're considering going to the BBKA Spring Convention. I'm going in the hopes of learning more about how to be a better beekeeper—more repetition! Also, there are savings to be had at the trade stands, and maybe some chat with other beekeepers too. See the mini-poster below for details.

And finally, I know you'll be looking forward to getting re-acquainted with your bees as much as I am. Happy beekeeping!

Manek Dubash, Editor



**Spring 2023
Convention**

Friday 21 - Saturday 22 - Sunday 23 April 2023
Harper Adams University, Shropshire, TF10 8NB

Lectures, Workshops and Seminars covering a wide range of practical and scientific topics, directed at all levels of experience, presented by leading experts

Bumper Trade Show Saturday 22nd

Speakers and Tutors include: Randy Oliver (virtually), Samuel Ramsey (virtually), Marin Anastasov, Martin Bencsik, Shirley & Richard Bond, Giles Budge, Stephen Case-Green, Julie Coleman, Michael Collier, Lynda Davies, Stephen Fleming, Mike Garratt, Fani Hatjina, John Hendrie, Luke & Suzie Hutchinson, Lynne Ingram, Angela Kirk, Stephen Martin, Jane Medwell, Jenny Morgan, Chris Park, Tom Pope, Sara Robb, Anne Rowberry, Debbie Smith, Victoria Soroker, Sean Stephenson, Oliver StJohn, Jane Stout, Jim & Val Vivian-Griffiths, Alison Wakeman and more.....

For further information, and to book from 30th January see the Spring Convention pages of www.bbka.org.uk

NEWSLETTER APRIL 2023

EVENTS

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

NEXT MONTH

- 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 April

The first inspection

At last, the first full inspection of the year! You may have been able to inspect in late March, but don't forget the rule of thumb about opening the hive: it should be warm enough to go out in shirt sleeves. So, usually you'd wait for a dry day of about 15°C or more with only a light wind.

During the early part of the year, it's not an issue about what time you do the inspection but later on in the year it's best to inspect around midday when most of the adult bees are out foraging.

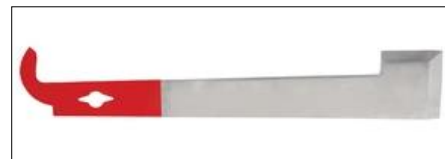
Experienced beekeepers have done this all before but it's worth thinking about before you get elbow-deep in your hive; you need a plan. Just take a few moments to think about why you

are inspecting and what you might need—and what you might find.

Why inspect?

The queen: you want to find the queen. I know this is difficult for new beekeepers, but it is a skill you need to learn and learn fast. If you're lucky, she has a big spot of colour on the back of her thorax. However, the old queen may have been superseded in the late autumn and have no marking; so, what do you do?

Scan each side of frame as it's removed; start on the edges and then zigzag across the face of the comb. The queen is bigger by at least half than any other bee in the hive at this time of year, she has a longer abdomen and has brown legs. If you fail to see her, don't despair, it will come with time. Your second option to knowing if the queen is present is to see if there is brood in



J hive tool

all stages; eggs, larvae, and sealed cells. If these are all present, then she's in there somewhere. Note; if you see multiple eggs in one cell then this is a sign that there may be a laying worker present in the hive and no queen.

Disease: the new beekeeper can't be expected to be able to identify all the diseases that affect bees, but they should know how to spot that something is not right. Healthy larvae should be pearly white, shiny and have clear segmentation, lying in the bottom of the cell in a tight 'C' shape. Sealed worker cells should be biscuit coloured (because the wax seal has been mixed



Sting-proof bee suit—the Sentinel II

What do you need?

Personal equipment

Bee suit/jacket: Do you know how to put it on so it is bee-proof? Check the seals around the sleeves and legs/bottom of jacket. Check the zip closers on the veil.

Gloves: It is better to use disposable gloves, either latex, or my choice, long-cuffed nitriles but you can use ordinary washing up gloves which you can rinse in a washing soda solution between inspections. The long sleeved 'hazmat' gloves are too thick for delicate manipulations and the leather type could be vector for disease as they are seldom cleaned regularly.

Boots: Either Wellingtons or Rigger type are OK, as you can tuck your suit legs or trousers into them. Bees tend not to crawl down, so always tuck loose ends into the top of the boots or into the top of gloves.

Smoker: Any type is OK. Warning, do not try to light it with your veil on, at best you could melt the veil, at worst; if it catches alight you will be in all sorts of trouble. Make sure you

know how to light the smoker and are able to keep it alight. Don't use matches unless you're a Boy Scout. I use a plumber's blowtorch, but others have been known to use crème brûlée torches. For a new beekeeper, it's probably best just to use old egg boxes or shredded cardboard from your favourite delivery company, but as you progress there are other solutions to smoker fuel. My preference is chipped wood from any tree surgeon; dried, it burns for ages.

Hive tool: These are many and various but start with the standard 'J' type (above) which will do almost everything you want.

Hive equipment

Keep to hand a selection of hive parts as you may want to replace damaged items as you find them. If nothing else, make a note of the bits that need changing.

I usually take this opportunity to replace the floor, boxes, crown board and roof as the accumulation of propolis and wax over the winter will make any later inspection harder.

Seasonal tips for April (cont.)



An unmarked queen

with pollen to make it air permeable) and should have no noticeable holes in them. Any capped drone cells present will look similar but will be domed due to the egg being laid in a worker cell and not a cell made for drones.

If the brood pattern is any different, or there is a strange smell coming off the comb; sometimes likened to the smell of Copydex glue, then quickly seek help from your mentor or the bee inspector—see [back page for contact details](#).

Space: It's still important to ensure there is enough space for the queen to lay. With early flowering trees and flowers in bloom, the workers need to be able to store this nectar without taking up the space the queen needs.

When the colony has expanded so that it covers both sides of about 6-8 frames, put a super on. If this is filled with new foundation it may be better to omit the queen excluder until they have started to draw out the comb.

Stores: the colony needs to be able to support itself during this period and will need to have about 3-4kg of stores. A full brood frame will contain about 2-2.5kg so you will have to estimate the amount of stores distributed through the hive.

Hopefully, with a good tide and a following wind the weather will stay good, and by the end of the month there should be enough forage to see them start laying down honey for the first harvest in late June.

Opening the hive

All the literature suggests that you puff a little smoke ([they're not beagles](#)) at the entrance and wait for a minute or

so before lifting the lid of the hive. The rationale is that the bees think the hive is in danger from a forest fire and, in preparation for evacuation, they load up on honey which makes them less annoyed. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't.

The next technique the new beekeeper must learn is how to open the hive and remove frames in a quick, efficient manner but without any sudden movements or cracking of stuck components. Here's how.

Lift the lid off the hive and place it upside down on the ground or a spare stand (it saves you bending). Gently insert the chisel end of your hive tool at a shallow angle into the joint between the crown board and the top of the brood box. Work your tool all the way around the joint until the crown board comes off. Try to avoid the crack as the propolis seal gives way.

Check the underside of the board to make sure the queen is not sitting on it; it's unlikely but bees don't read books. Place the crown board on the roof so the corners are diagonally opposite to those of the roof.

At this point you may want to give another little puff of smoke into the hive. Working from one end/side of the brood box, gently prise the first frame/dummy board away from its neighbour.

When both sides have been freed, keeping your hive tool in your hand, lift the frame/dummy board vertically out of the brood box using the lugs on each end of the frame.

Check to see if the queen is on it. If not, place it in front of the hive or in a frame holder. Repeat with the next



Healthy brood



Smoking calms the bees—sometimes.

frame but, after inspecting it, place it in the gap left by the first frame/dummy board. Repeat all the way through the hive, maintaining the gap as you go.

Once you have inspected every frame and noted the condition of the brood and stores level (and found the queen), slide the frames back into their original position. This can be done all together, in groups or one at a time, but the fewer movements the better as you are less likely to damage the bees, especially the queen.

Replace the first frame/dummy board and rebuild the hive.

Finishing up

Just a couple more jobs to do: record what you have seen. If you have a memory like a sieve, like me, you'll have forgotten what you did or saw by the next inspection. You can devise your own record card or there are plenty available [on the web](#).

Then, to avoid attracting rats and mice and reducing the chances of spreading disease, you need to clean up the apiary, collecting debris removed from the hive by disposing of it in the bin or burning it.

Clean any components you replaced; don't leave them to later, as later never comes and you end up with an annoying pile by the end of the year. Clean your hive tool and gloves in a solution of washing soda. Wash your bee suit.

And so the season begins. Next time: queen cells and swarm prevention.

Another Veiled Beekeeper



Graham Bubloz
Chairman

Words from the Chair

Spring is here: we've had a few days of sun, and already had a call to collect a swarm!

I know that some have lost colonies over the winter and so wish to join the swarm list, so in March I sent out a reminder to do just that. Please make sure that you understand the process I outlined and send your request to [Swarm Co-ordinator Ian White](#) as soon as possible. If you have a question or comment, please let me know.

Those who attended recent meetings will know this, but if not, I am very pleased to announce that we have a new secretary: Pat Clarke. Please welcome and support her, especially over the next few months.

We have another of our occasional Bee Chat evenings where we do just that: talk about bees over a pint at a local pub. This month, we're going to [The Half Moon, Plumpton](#) on 5 April from 7.30pm. You're welcome to join us; usually 10 or so turn up.

Our final winter meeting is coming up on 19 April, where B&L member Nigel Kermode will talk about of "The social side of

beekeeping". I hope that you'll come along and join in. We'll also be broadcasting via Zoom (and won't have any of the problems that we experienced for the talk last month!)

It won't be much longer before the first of our summer out-apiary visits takes place, on 22nd April at Isfield and 23rd April at Barcombe. [All meetings are shown on the website.](#)

Looking forward, we will be involved at the [annual Bee Market](#) in May. This year, we shall be selling refreshments and cakes and we very much need your help in making cakes for the stall to sell. In addition, we need help at the event itself on Saturday 20th May at Downsview College, Uckfield for part of the day to sell to the punters. So, if you can spare a bit of time or bake a cake or two, please contact Ann Butcher who has kindly agreed to organise the stall on our behalf this year.

That's about all for this month. I hope to meet you at one of the out-apiary meetings over the summer.



Manek Dubash
Asian Hornet
Team Co-ordinator

Asian Hornet report

Spring is when, like everything else in nature, new life emerges, including Asian hornet queens. But Asian hornets (*Vespa velutina*) can decimate honey bee colonies because European honey bees have no evolved defences.

Now is also the best time to stop the destructive invaders, before the queens can build new colonies. So here's a refresher of what they do and how to identify them.

The Asian hornet is an invasive species, accidentally imported in 2004 from China into southern France, from where it spread undetected and almost unchecked for a few years until it was too late to eliminate it.

The insect spread north and west, and is now a major pest and danger to both bees and humans in France, Spain and Portugal.

It's on our borders in the Channel Islands, Jersey in particular. Jersey residents are well-acquainted with it: they know to report when one is spotted. The first new queen was spotted last month, and new ones are emerging daily.

Identification is key. The National Bee Unit produces cards and posters to help with identification, and there's an app for iPhones and Androids. The key identification points are yellow legs, orange face and a single orange band on the abdomen. They're a bit smaller than the native European hornet.

As on Jersey, the public are our eyes and ears. We should be distributing identification cards and posters where possible.

So if you or anyone you know spots one, please don't hesitate to let me know. And check your sheds and eaves for nests.



Queen rearing talk, by Malcolm Wilkie



No mad March hares were in evidence during a magnificent talk on 1 March by Malcolm Wilkie, Chair of High Weald Beekeepers, about queen rearing.

Often seen as a difficult if not arcane process, Malcolm was at pains to demystify the business of making queens, using a couple of key epithets: 'always have an insurance policy', and 'don't give them a choice'.



Swarm preps

To a well-attended hybrid meeting—where the audience is physically present as well as online—he explained what to do in key circumstances, using the plethora of props he'd brought with



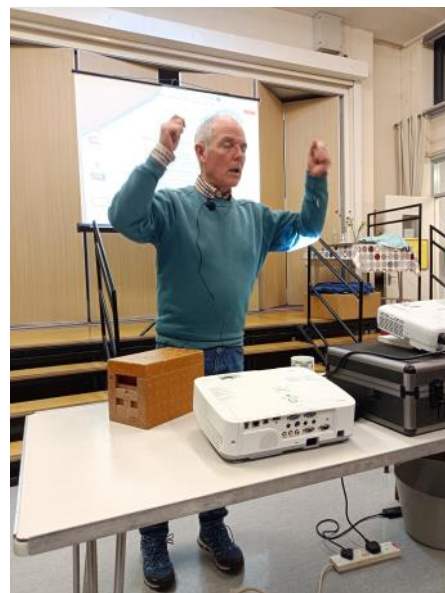
him. First, when swarm preparations become evident, and then how to make a nuc—don't be afraid of the nurse bees, they're gormless and can't sting, he said. He went through in detail how he invokes a colony to create queens, how to use a mini-nuc, such as an Apidea, and what to look and listen for, using copious slides and videos.

Come the autumn, the mini-nucs need to be united, a process he also explained in detail, along with how to use a [Cloake board](#) and the [Nicot system](#). Another use for a small apple corer was for grafting larvae (who knew?), making life easier for those whose eyesight isn't what it was.

For those present on that wet and windy evening, it was an enlivening talk that generated plenty of discussion afterwards.

Aftermath

Unfortunately, Malcolm had overrun somewhat due to glitches in our technology—not Malcolm's fault at all—which not only delayed the start and paused his presentation at times,



but also meant those watching online sometimes either couldn't see or hear what was going on. It also meant that the post-meeting chat and tea—crucial elements—were severely truncated.

We know what went wrong and it won't recur but it was disappointing for those watching online, for which B&L can only apologise.

Enthusiasm kindled

That aside, it was a great talk and Malcolm's energetic presentational style was infectious and kindled much enthusiasm, especially given the first meeting of the queen rearing group was due just a handful of weeks afterwards.

We'll be reporting on that in the next issue.

Words & photos by Manek Dubash



From our apiaries: Hove and Isfield

Hove

Greetings from Hove Apiary, under new management! My husband Jose and I have recently taken over the running of this site from Jude.

Given that she organises and runs all the fantastic educational programs for the Division, and manages Grassroots apiary and the queen rearing programme, it was an opportunity to take something off her plate.

Winter has been a time to improve the facilities at Hove. A new fence was built and a hornbeam tree hedge planted to give a bit more protection from the neighbouring allotments.

We then took the hives over to Grassroots (Burgess Hill) in late November so we could make these improvements without disturbing the hives too much. The plan was to move them back to Hove early in the New Year.



Unfortunately, we've got off to a very unlucky start. When Jude took a quick look to see how the colonies were faring, all but one of the four had died.

We think one colony had tried to requeen around September—Jose spotted an unmarked queen when he was feeding the colony. This suggests she may have not had time to be properly mated and so over the winter, with no fresh brood, the colony dwindled and died.

The second one to die out had no signs of disease before the move. Bees were found clumped in pockets on the frames, so maybe suffered from isolation starvation, despite having plenty of fondant. This hive had exhibited defensive behaviour recently, perhaps the change in behaviour had something to do with them not surviving.

The final hive died soon after being moved—perhaps the queen was damaged during transportation.

All four hives had been treated for varroa, and showed no signs of other diseases. This leaves us with a solitary colony, which is still at Grassroots.

We're meeting this weekend to decide our course of action, hopefully by the first out-apiary meeting we will have a plan in place to repopulate.

Felicity Alder, Apiary Manager

Isfield

Not much has happened since last October, except the odd visit to feed fondant and carry out oxalic acid vaporisation treatments. By February, I checked what equipment I would need for the coming season and spent a morning going through the brood boxes and supers, seeing which needed frames and/or foundation.

Rats!

As I delved into the stacks, I noticed empty acorn shells and droppings, and the occasional piece of chewed foundation. Then I found the crown board with a large section of edging missing and a pile of wood chips, so I had no option but to empty the shed and examine every bit of kit.

It wasn't until I came to the bottom of a stack of poly nucs that I found the culprit. A rat had enlarged the nuc entrance hole and made a cosy nest of leaves inside, having pushed a bag full of honey jar lids to one side. Total damage, a couple of chewed frames and sheets of foundation, chewed crown board, three shredded bee jackets, 72

jar lids, a poly nuc and the faint odour of rat. If you have an out-apiary, it may be worth checking your kit soon.

Queen rearing

With the start of the new season almost upon us, if I've not physically started making preparations, but have pondered what will happen at Isfield this year. The apiary will be part of the queen rearing programme and I will be attempting to graft directly into plastic cells, then transferring the resulting queen cells into Apidea mating nucs.

As prep for this, and to make sure that I don't get any surprises later in April, I checked the varroa mite drop last week and am happy to report that



all three hives had an average of under one mite per day, over seven days.

My own apiary had similar results but there was a slight problem with one of the varroa boards, where I use the plywood boards supplied with the floors. Due to slightly damp conditions, one of the boards had swollen: I could not remove the board and had to replace the whole floor.

Building up

All hives are now building up and on fine days, bees are bringing in pollen from the early flowering plants and trees. I posted on the queen rearing WhatsApp a short video of activity at a hive on 14 March when it was only about 10°C (see image). The following Thursday was even warmer and activity even more marked. I took the opportunity to check the stores in the nadired supers and was surprised to see at least five frames with stores.

That first inspection is only a few weeks away. Hope to see you at one of the apiary meetings this year.

Ian White, Apiary Manager

Come and learn all about the fascinating world of bees at the

Sussex Beekeepers' Association

Bee Market

SATURDAY 20TH MAY 2023 - 10 AM TO 4.30 PM

Uckfield College

Downsview Crescent, Uckfield TN22 3DJ

EVERYONE WELCOME - ADMISSION £2

Bees, plants and honey on sale
A talk on honey bees:
'From Buckfast to Buckingham Palace'
Interactive Children's Bee Workshop
Refreshments and snacks available
Live bee demonstration
Equipment auction
Gardening ideas
Trade stands
Workshops
And much more!



<https://sussexbeeorguk.wordpress.com/sbka-events/>

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B&L events 2023

Winter meetings

All indoor meetings start at 7.15 for a 7.30pm start at Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Eastgate Street, Lewes BN7 2LR.

Last indoor meeting

Date	Speaker	Topic
19 Apr	Nigel Kermode (B&L)	The social side of beekeeping

Spring/summer apiary meetings

Date	Location	Topic
23 Apr	Barcombe (Tony B.)	Swarm control, collection & hiving
29 Apr	Barcombe (Tony B.)	Swarm control, collection & hiving
30 Apr	Grassroots (Jude N.)	Swarm control, collection & hiving
13 May	Isfield (Ian W.)	Swarm control, collection & hiving

Bee Chats

Wednesday 5 April, 7.30pm, [Half Moon, Plumpton](#)

Wednesday 10 May, 7.30pm, [The Dorset, Lewes](#)

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.



Managed by the Community Development Foundation
Funded by the Office of the Third Sector



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