

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

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EDITORIAL



July and August: the months we've all been working towards, if the honey harvest is your ultimate goal, or at least one of them.

This is when we find out if all the hard work and expenditure—probably more of the latter than one imagined—have been worth it. But little beats seeing a stack of jars full of honey made by your bees. Straight out of the 'how to make a beekeeper happy' play book.

It's to the hard work element that I'd like to return. I know that every one of your committee members puts in hours of unpaid work, in particular helping those who are just embarking on this wonderful hobby of ours.

That said, and at the risk of embarrassing the individuals involved, I'm going to mention two who have gone—in my humble opinion—above and beyond. This is not in any way to belittle the sterling work the other committee

members have put in—and there are too many examples of that to mention—but Jude New and Tony Birkbeck have gone many extra miles.

Jude spearheads our educational programme, devising and teaching classes for all aspects of beekeeping, as well as keeping us up to speed with the latest developments over social media.

Tony has given up entire weekends to help members with practical, hands-on processes, as well as participating in education. All this is on top of their own activities as beekeepers and—in Tony's case—running a small business as well. Not to mention the much-publicised broken arm...

So hats off and a round of applause to you both.

Welcome to our new secretary

Please give a warm welcome to B&L's new Secretary, Matt Budgen.

He has offered to shoulder much of the administration of B&L, a job that needs attention to detail and ability to work with the rest of the committee and membership at large.

The committee has accepted his offer, following the departure of Pat Clarke for personal reasons.

Big thanks are due then both to Matt for his offer, and to Pat for having done the job admirably since February 2023.

Manek Dubash, Editor

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 August: harvest time

Despite some people's expectations, I have hives that swarm. There I've said it and I feel better for it. Even though I tried to carry out swarm management some hives go away from me and swarmed not once or even twice but three or four times. If they didn't swarm the queens were superseded at least twice. I fully subscribe to the notion that the bees don't read the same books as us, but I think they're making it up as they go along. Now as we drift into August all that nonsense is behind us I'm expecting this year to be very good in terms of my honey harvest.

I was lucky enough to have my apiary surrounded by Oil Seed Rape (OSR) this spring and I managed to take off over 100lb of honey by the end of May. The warm settled weather we have experienced this summer has resulted in a number of my hives having aircraft warning lights fitted to the top. One in Hove has five supers on it. Anecdotally, I've heard other beekeepers are also experiencing bumper harvests this summer. If it carries on like this, we could all run out of jars to put it in. I hope the Division is going to do a bulk purchase of jars this autumn so I can restock for next year.

Removing super frames

There's a variety of methods of removing full frames, the simplest being to shake or brush the bees off. The frame is then placed in an empty box, covered to stop the bees repopulating it. The drawback is that it takes a while and you end up with a lot of annoyed bees flying around you.

More convenient is using a [clearer board](#). Porter bee escapes fit into the holes in the crown board. They can be tricky to use though so there are several alternatives available from your



friendly neighbourhood retailer. I tend to prefer rhombus escapes pinned under a crown board (photo below).

You can also use a chemical repellent sprinkled over a cloth placed above the supers. Replace the lid and after several minutes the bees have been driven out and you can remove the boxes.

Ensure you have enough space for the cleared bees to go into by clearing into a part used super or eke. Do not try and clear bees out of the supers directly into the brood box, they just won't fit.

Taking the honey

When taking the harvest, ensure all honey in the frames is capped or, if uncapped, that it has a water content below 20%. Above this level, honey is likely to ferment once harvested and stored.

It's easy to measure the water content with a refractometer (photo below). To use, put a small sample of honey on the inspection plate, flip the cover over the sample and hold it up to the light. The eyepiece enables you to read off the moisture content. If properly calibrated, this gives a very accurate result. Calibration methodology is just a quick google away.

If you don't want to buy a device, try the shake method. Hold a frame of unsealed honey upside down and shake it. If honey drips out, it's unripe and you need to return it to the hive.

However, if you are keen to take as much as you can and can't wait for it to be ripen, then you can put the frames in a warm, bee-proof room and use a dehumidifier to reduce the water content. After a few days, the water content should be at the required level.

To feed or not to feed

If you have maximised your harvest, be prepared to feed your bees with syrup, supplementing it later in the year with fondant.

If you want to leave some honey on, the hive will need about 20-25Kg of stores to see the bees through the winter, which is about a full super and all the stores in the brood box.

Varroa monitoring

Once you've taken the honey off, thoroughly check the brood for disease and mite levels. Only treat if the bees need it. Use the [National Bee Unit guide on Managing Varroa](#) and look for Integrated Pest Management to check when to treat.

In round numbers, if your daily average mite drop is above 10, then you need to treat immediately. [Several treatments](#) are available to us but be aware that some treatments need to go on before it gets too cold—or before they get too old.

Supersedure

You may also experience queen supersedure at this time of year. Supersedure/emergency queen cells are generally drawn on the face of the brood comb, unlike swarm cells that are usually on the bottom edge.

Do not knock them down.

There is still a chance that the new queen can still be mated before the weather cools and the drones disappear. As the old queen starts to fail, the workers develop several replacements but, instead of swarming, the original queen and her daughter may continue share the hive and to lay on the same comb until eventually, at a later inspection, you notice an unmarked queen.

Inspections

The good news is that there's no real need to inspect weekly, as there is very little chance of your bees swarming so late in the season.

I start to wind down my visits to fortnightly, then monthly until March, when the brood starts to expand and the circus begins again.

Hope you have a good harvest!

The Veiled Beekeeper



Cheap refractometer available on eBay



Graham Bubloz
Chairman

Words from the Chair

Events, events and more events

We've held a few summer out-apiary meetings—but attendance levels have been disappointingly low.

So, please try and come along to support the hosts and also to get to know your fellow members of the Division. The dates are published here in the newsletter, on our [webpage](#) and on our social media sites, Facebook and WhatsApp. If you're not already a member of the latter groups (you can see at a glance what's happening locally) and you're unsure of how to get involved—contact me and I'll gladly explain.

The programme of events through the forthcoming winter season is being collated—and if you have a suggestion for something that we should include, please contact [Bob Curtis](#).

The next Bee Chat evening is at 7.30pm at The Hope Inn, Newhaven on Wednesday 2 August. These casual / informal gatherings

are proving increasingly popular, so I hope to see you there.

As a group, we're attending the Rottingdean Fair on Saturday 5 August. Come along and say hello to the team if you're in the area.

Sad news

I have to let you know that I am not planning to continue as Chair beyond the next AGM in February 2024. Consequently, we shall need to find someone to take over the role. So, if you're interested, or indeed if you can contribute with any committee activities, please let me know and we can talk it through.

Good news

Our membership levels have again increased this month. Currently, we have 186 beekeepers on the books which is great news and, I think, unprecedented.



Manek Dubash
Asian Hornet
Team Co-ordinator

Asian Hornet report

Asian hornet larvae are now being laid at full tilt in their paper-mâché nests. This means that any *Vespa velutina* worker you see has come from an established nest. Secondary nests are now being built—they're the big ones that you disturb at your peril.

In July, two reports of Asian hornet sightings suggest that at least one queen managed to establish a nest near Dover.

The BBKA has issued the following list of *nine* Asian hornet finds in 2023 to date:

- 20 July: Credible sighting of Asian hornets in Gravesend, Kent. Shortly after NBU inspectors reached the site they located a small primary nest in a nearby residential garden. The nest was destroyed on the same day
- 17 July: Confirmed sighting near Dover, Kent. Specimen collected—reports from Defra suggest nest found on 19.7.23
- 1 July: Confirmed sighting from near Dover, Kent specimen collected which will be analysed by scientists.
- 22 June: Small primary nest of Asian hornets—nest collected—earliest date in

the season that a nest has ever been found in Great Britain.

- 28 May: Confirmed sighting near Canterbury, Kent—specimen collected.
- 18 May: Credible sighting approx. 15 miles from Ashford in Kent—specimen collected
- 17 April: Credible report—ferry from Poole to Cherbourg
- 13 April: Confirmed sighting in Folkestone, Kent.
- 5 April: Credible report—Asian hornet discovered inside a cauliflower in Northumberland—specimen collected



From our apiaries: Barcombe, Grassroots, Hove & Isfield

Barcombe



Barcombe apiary. Photo: Tony Birkbeck

Not a lot to report this month at Barcombe, partly because the bees are behaving well and concentrating on the honey flow but mainly because, in the middle of the prime beekeeping season, I decided to disappear for a couple of weeks driving a small open top sports car round the Alps!!

[Lightweight! Ed.]

I can report however that all hives are thriving with good queens. Hive number 5 and its split that we did at the apiary day back on 7 May are a bit grumpy and I have noted in my records that they are top of my list of re-queening activities for next year.

I have managed to extract 72lb of honey so far which has been jarred and will be sold for the B&L at Rottingdean Fair on 5 August. Do come and see us!

Each hive still has supers in place but its not yet capped so we will see how that goes over the next few weeks before I start any varroa treatments and the beginning of winter preparations.



It really can't be that time of year already, can it?

Tony Birkbeck, Apiary Manager

Grassroots

Grassroots has been quiet over the last month, although we'll be reporting on the Seasonal Bee Inspector's routine visit, due to take place on Sunday 4 September.

The SBI, Diane Steele, will talk about varroa and be part of our getting the bees ready for winter. The bees might be a bit frisky because they should be finishing their Apiguard treatment around then.

I have been directing new beekeepers on the B+L Buzz WhatsApp group to her. If they have queries about what they see in the hive or if Diane thinks it necessary, she will visit, will give professional advice and register our new beekeepers to BeeBase. They get to meet her and hopefully feel less stressed about their bees.

Jude New, Apiary Manager

Hove

Greetings from Hove Apiary!

Currently we have four colonies at Hove. Our fifth colony had a drone-laying queen for some time, so in order to try and save this, we got rid of her (Jose committed the regicide, causing much consternation) and tried to raise a new one by giving them a frame of BIAS. Unfortunately this didn't have the



Felicity shows Katherine a frame of bees at Hove. Below: hives shelter from the summer sun. Photos: Graham Bubloz

desired effect as the bees resisted building any queen cells.

There was a decent number of bees left so we decided to merge them with two separate, smaller colonies using the newspaper method. One merger was successful and now has a decent number of bees to help bring in remaining stores ready for the winter.

The other was less so, with signs of fighting and a missing queen. Interesting how bees from the same colony can have such different effects.

We're hoping (probably hopelessly) for some nice weather soon so they have time to raise and mate a new queen. Fingers crossed!

Felicity Alder, Apiary Manager



Education report

The long and short courses run by and for B&L are advertised [on our website](#), on the B&L Facebook page and just for luck on the B&L Buzz WhatsApp page. In 2022-3 there were courses for module 6 and module 1, BBKA Basic Assessment, Novice – for new and improving beekeepers, Absolute Beginners Course (ABC) for new beekeepers, Queen Rearing Project and—new this year—a half-day frame-cleaning course and flat-pack assembly of hive parts.

Upcoming courses

In 2023-24 there is no module course planned. However, there is a series of practical short courses being designed to meet health and safety and licensing regulations. There are more short courses being designed to cover annual events, for example:

- swarm control
- colony increase
- queen rearing
- feeding bees spring and winter
- bee diseases how to manage them and who to tell
- treatments for varroa: what choices there are, how they work when to use them.

We can also include more hive-making sessions, a possible candle-making evening, for rolled, moulded and possibly dipped candles, half-day wax wrapping, and an evening making lotions and potions session with honey and wax as ingredients.

The nitty-gritty

As always there will be a small charge made to cover the costs of running the session(s). Dates to be confirmed.

Course information can get lost on our social media, so please check on the website where there will be a reference, place and date of any meetings intended for training or assessment.

The year in view

This year, members of the Novice Beekeeping Group met to complete their course, to be given information



Queen cell found: what now?

and to ask questions about their beekeeping and their bees. There were a small, perfect group of six who started the course mid-way through the year in 2022.

Since April 2023 we have discussed different hive types available, the pros and cons of all of them.

I don't think I was able to persuade any that one-size-box beekeeping or top-bar beekeeping were for them, although we did have lengthy discussion about prolific queens and the benefits of Deep National, Commercial and Langstroth hives.

We were able to visit Grassroots apiary to back up our discussions. We marked queens when we could or drones when we couldn't. Also, on one of the visits the Queen Rearing Project had begun, so we were also able to see what a Ben Harden-grafted larvae hive looked like and discuss queen rearing.

Another meeting was spent looking at the National Bee Unit (NBU) pictures of brood diseases in the colony, how to spot them and what if anything, can be done. We went to Grassroots later to



Wax moth: a strong colony will keep them in check

conduct a disease inspection on a couple of the hives, the colonies passed their health test. I think the Novices did well, shortly afterwards our local seasonal bee inspector Dan Morgan made his first visit, looked in all the hives on site and gave them a clean bill of health. He found evidence of wax moth in a hive which is a low priority, the colony was and is dealing with it.

We spent the last session speaking about swarm control and colony increase. One of our members had ordered some bees from Paynes and planned to go on holiday shortly after. She was able to use the Demaree method of swarm control while she was away, knowing that the bees would be waiting for her to return, not spread about the neighbourhood. On her return the one queen cell made was put to good use, so the colony that was one, is now two!

The Novice beekeepers formed firm beekeeping bonds; they have lent each other equipment, helped to re capture swarms, and made full use of the B&L Buzz group to support each other online on how to manage their colonies, to protect them from disease, wasps, and wax moth.

Awards and certificates

The BBKA Basic assessment participants were awarded their certificates and several prepared their hive products for the annual honey show 2023 they also won trophies for their honey and wax products.

When you see the announcements for the B&L Annual Honey Show 2024, look at the rules and put forward a plate of honey biscuits (choose your own recipe) a honey cake (recipe provided) bee-related photo, honey in several classes, wax by weight and by candle, sometimes there are other classes too.

It's good to see new names on the trophies. We look forward to seeing even more entries in 2024 from our members.

Jude New, Training Co-ordinator

Swarm Co-ordinator's report



After the last two disappointing years, I was hoping for a good year this time round. The weather was rather cool and wet with a Northeasterly blowing in most of April so the first swarm call came in on 30 April.

May stayed settled but still cool but with the lengthening days and when the temperature did start to rise and there was a regular stream of calls.

However there were two significant gaps in the month; from 6-11 April and 18th-21st with no calls at all.

Over the course of 15 days we got 25 calls, 11 swarms were collected the rest either were not reachable, flew away before we could catch them or were not honey bees.

By June we had lost the nagging northeasterly and with the longer days and good daytime temperatures, I was hoping for the call rate to go up, but it stayed at a moderate level. Again there was a significant gap in the calls between 17th-23 June.

Over the course of 15 days we got 22 calls with 13 swarms collected. We



	2022	%	2023	%
Total calls	67	100	51	100
Swarms collected	45	67.16	25	49.02
Not recovered	6	8.96	13	25.49
Non-honey bee	11	16.42	10	19.61
Other	4	5.97	3	5.88

were still not getting to all the calls in time and the number of non-honey bee calls were increasing.

Come this month, 17 July at the time of writing, and we have had 3 calls with only one swarm collected and one wasp nest destroyed.

So, having started this piece hoping for a better year, how does this compare to 2022 when I thought that was poor?

Not too good is my overall assessment: 23 percent fewer calls, and with 44 percent fewer swarms.

And to round it off, here are some anecdotal thoughts and observations I have gathered from my other bee-collecting colleagues:

- There appeared to be fewer flying insects overall this summer

- Due to changes in people's working patterns, there are more swarm collectors
- People working from home have managed their bees better
- Very few prime swarms
- Lots of casts
- Swarm locations being shared on social media and not via traditional routes
- People can't be bothered to report swarms

However, this doesn't seem to be borne out by over 80 attendees at a Zoom call I attended, which was hosted by the BBKA. They feel that there were more swarms than ever this year.

Not sure what 2024 will bring [*who is?—Ed.*].

Watch this space.

Ian White, Swarm Co-ordinator



Left: Swarm cells at Barcombe. Leading to... Middle and Right: a couple of unusual swarms we *didn't* find in the B&L area

The 2023 Queen Rearing Group—final report

This year saw a marked growth in the work going into queen rearing. Often perceived as an arcane specialism undertaken only by those anointed in the dark arts of grafting, we learnt—among many other things—that this need not necessarily be the case.

Here's an update on the final meeting for this year of those B&L members involved in queen rearing.

The queen rearing group met over lunch to talk of bees, queen cells, virgin queens and finally mated queens they have worked with this season. The more formal meeting at The Barn was abandoned this year, in favour of a lot of casual chat about the project during which the apiary managers collected information.

We were joined for a short while by Joy Garnsey, she lives next door, is a member of B&L and it was great to see her for the short while that she was in the garden with us.

Why rear queens?

The queen rearing project was started last year with the objective of raising queens with members and taking advantage of the distance between the apiaries for mating. Drone Congregation Areas (DCA) in the centre of Brighton may have made mating difficult or patchy. This year the apiary

managers agreed to set up a queen rearing programme in each of the teaching apiaries excluding Hove this year, which should have been able to tap into DCAs in the more open parts of Sussex as well as utilise the apiaries of the participants.

It is part of the apiary manager's job to rear queens, to re-queen the colonies to help prevent swarming and to select for calm bees for our members to work with in the teaching apiaries.

So Ian White, apiary manager and swarm co-ordinator, and I met Tony Birkbeck to find a way to include a queen rearing group. Tony wanted to use the Nicot system, while Ian and I favoured grafting and non-grafting methods.

Nicot rules?

Tony, whose titles include Sith Lord, apiary manager, mentor and queen rearer extraordinaire, broke his arm near the start of the project, which he didn't allow to get in his way! He used the Nicot system exclusively, and produced many queen cells for use in Apidea and for re-queening hives at Barcombe.

He was also named Sith Lord for his endeavours to show members how to mark and clip queens to prevent major

swarming incidents. He demonstrated on drones in the colonies at Barcombe.

Planning for the future

How do you measure success in a project such as this?

Is it on the number of queen cells produced? The number of virgin queens incubated, the number of mated queens produced or in the regular meeting of like-minded beekeepers willing to learn and share success and failures?

From the couple of hours eating and drinking at The Cock Inn at Ringmer yesterday, I would say that the group had a lot of success in all these ways.

There is more that we can do. The skills learned will be invaluable to the individuals and to the group.

The apiary managers need to meet and talk about the informal conversations we had with the group, and decide if we shall run this project again, if we need to change/improve the way it is delivered.

Watch this space for more information and join us next year if you would like to be part of the venture. I added pictures from this group page to illustrate the work covered, on our Facebook page. Thank you everybody.

Jude New, Training Co-ordinator

My personal opinion? The more B&L members (especially us newbees) who can get their heads around queen rearing, the more competent we will be. Then, eventually, the better breeding stock we will have flying around.

Many thanks to all for organising and answering questions.

Heidi Burgess responds

Although I did not attempt to raise my own queens this year and did not get to as many of the apiary meetings as I hoped, as a novice I got an ENORMOUS amount from being part of this group. I now understand that queen rearing

can be done on a small scale for us back garden, hobby keepers.

Next year I will definitely be using my Apidea (now it is out of the cellophane) and potentially get an incubator to raise some of those queen cells which otherwise I would squash. I need a little more practice with the grafting.



Book digest: The Mind of a Bee, by Lars Chittka

Jeff Rodrigues has been reading Lars Chittka's latest book, *The Mind of a Bee*, which he really enjoyed but did not find an easy read. Here he describes the take-aways about the key stages in the evolution of the bee brain.

The first big developmental change (in the early Jurassic) was when some Hymenoptera switched from a vegetarian to a carnivore diet. Rather than laying eggs on vegetation they began to lay on an animal host.ⁱ This development was accompanied by a leap in brain development, in which sensory, memory and learning processes became enlarged.

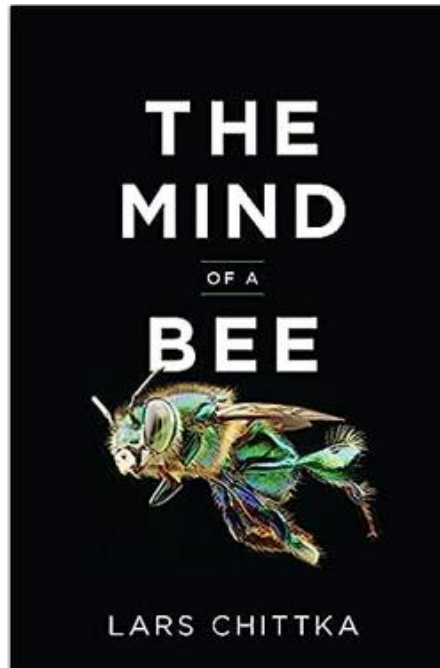
The second change was putting larvae in specially constructed nests rather than on vegetation or on animal hosts. This required the development of construction skills and a much more highly developed spatial capability, especially in memorising where 'home' was and being able to fly to and from it.

Third, bees' protein and carbohydrate preferences lead them to use flowers as sources of their food. Bees' source of food is dispersed rather than aggregated, especially in temperate forests and in meadows, and this creates a pressure to further develop spatial capability.

These last two factors shape the bee brain especially strongly. Bees have to recognise floral scent, patterns and colours, landscape features to mark home and feeding districts, learn 'path integration' (eg fly home in a straight line although they may have meandered for miles in foraging activity), use multi-sensory channels of perception and be able to count.ⁱⁱ

Small-brained animals need strategies to get round how limited their working memory is. It appears that it is not the number of neurons but the number of connections between them -synaptic links- that is critical. Chittka states that the bee brain is able to make over one billion such connections.ⁱⁱⁱ But there are limitations -for example, the flight speed of a forager is more constrained by her brain's processing power than by any bio-physics of flight.^{iv}

The development of mushroom-shaped bodies in the bee brain (their



In *The Mind of a Bee*, Lars Chittka draws from decades of research, including his own pioneering work, to argue that bees have remarkable cognitive abilities.

brains are bilaterally symmetrical) have resulted from the evolutionary need for long-term memory. These mushroom bodies have the same convolutions as our brain cortex (the walnut or crushed paper pattern which enables a large area of brain to be contained in a comparatively small space) and occupy 20 percent of their total brain mass.

Bees have enormous diversity in neuron types—this diversity and complexity contrasts with the simplicity of their neural circuits. The mushroom bodies are the point of convergence for many sensory pathways (sugar, colour, scent) and enable complex learning with simple neural circuits (for example, rose and geranium is more rewarding when combined than when separate).

One might imagine that these brains need to replicate into bees that are exactly the same. But bees in fact vary a

great deal—which I guess enables natural selection and heritability. Charles Turner (1867-1923)^v was the first scientist to establish that psychological differences in invertebrate individuals and colonies were heritable.^{vi}

We know that workers and queens are genetically indistinguishable yet just having different feeding regimes produces such physical and behavioural difference.

Chittka shows that individual bees that are exceptional at problem-solving exhibit more variable behaviours eg are more exploratory than others (one scientist suggested that a hard-wired predictable animal would be on the sure path to extinction because a predator would soon figure it out!).

Footnotes

- i. The host did not always die, though in the case of the digger wasp, it did...eventually. The wasp paralysed its prey and dragged it to a place where its eggs/larvae were located and the victim stayed fresh until needed by the larvae.
- ii. Bees are unable to recognise number sets and have to count serially. Their 'working memory' (the brain component that retains information for short periods) operates only for a few seconds. Therefore, bees prioritise time over accuracy.
- iii. Of course, not all insect behaviours require brain function - there are some insects that, when decapitated, can still walk and even construct a nest.
- iv. Using 'above & below' tests (becoming aware of where you are to above-below), bees learn faster than other laboratory animals and human babies).
- v. Turner was an African-American scientist, who, barred from using university lab facilities, nevertheless became a pioneer in insect study.
- vi. As we know from 'hygienic bees' and how their effective disease-management behaviours are passed on to their offspring.



B&L events 2023

All out-apiary meetings are subject to weather-related alteration or cancellation. Please keep an eye on emails and/or Facebook & WhatsApp Buzz for the latest updates.

Summer apiary meetings

Date	Location	Topic
13 Aug	Hove (José)	Honey management and winter prep
26 Aug	Hove (Jude)	Honey management and winter prep
27 Aug	Cooksbridge (Ian)	Honey management and winter prep

Bee Chats

Wednesday 2 August, 19.30, The Hope Inn, Fort Road, Newhaven

First winter meeting: 26 September 2023. Full details in next issue.

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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National Honey Show Rep: Vacant