Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers

A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

CONTENTS

EDITORIAL

Drama at Barcombe as a swarm was found to have set up home under the floor of one of the hives. More photos on p7. Photo: Alex Smith

Another lively month to report on, all in this month's newsletter.

There's lots going on in our apiaries, from broken arms—well, one broken arm—to swarms that never left the hive (see above), marked drones, queen rearing programmes that worked well, and some that didn't. As well as Jude's wonderful sight-enhancing apparatus: see page 6 for details.

We've an update on the war against varroa, the question being whether we are winning, Ross Eager's flatpack workshop, and a swarm that set up home on a broomstick. Bees bewitched?

The Hints & Tips feature this month majors on honey harvesting and supering, issues that will be top of mid at this time of year. When should you super? How many? When's a good time to harvest? And once you have extracted your honey—a process that's worth a book on its own—when next? Find out more in our topical tips section on the next page.

And on top of all that we plan four apiary days this month, so please come along. Whether a newbie or experienced or somewhere in between, it's worth it for the learning and the sociability.

Honey for sale?

Do you have—or soon will have—honey for sale? In which case, B&L can help you sell it. Jude New needs only an email from you and she will link you up with potential buyers, which come in via our website. Check out the details of how it all works on page 3.

Too many hives?

I'd planned to get my hive count up to six from two at the start of the year. With a combination of splits and swarms—two from my hives—I made it to six but an overshoot pushed it up to seven.

I think that gives a bit of resilience should something bad happen, and I hope that it will provide a good basis for experimentation in 2024. For now though, I'm hoping for a goodly harvest!

News: Flat roof needs a beekeeper

There's a roof in Brighton that needs bees: details in Graham's column on page 4.

Manek Dubash, Editor

NEWSLETTER
JULY 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

July

As I write we have had month of warm settled weather although the start of June was as bit on the cooler side than I would have hoped. Even so, with my hives surrounded by Oil Seed Rape (OSR) I was able to take over 100lbs of honey off before the start of June.

Despite the warm weather—much better than last year it has to be said—swarming this year has been very muted. A good thing for your colonies to some extent but it does mean that many new beeks haven't been able to get bees.

If nothing else, these periods teach us to be patient. If you have made sure your bees are as healthy and as well fed as possible, all you can do is leave it up to them. I know from experience that it can take six weeks from splitting a colony to finding newly laid eggs.

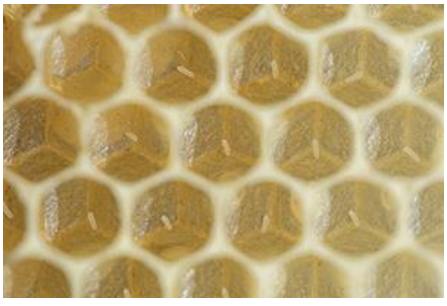
By early June, the queen should be laying to her maximum potential and colonies should be reaching maximum brood capacity by early July to capitalise on the flowering of the summer blooms which will continue until late autumn.

You should still continue with regular weekly inspections and be looking out for:

A queen laying viable brood in a good close pattern

- Enough room for the queen to lay
- Supers filling up
- Disease
- Sufficient stores until the next inspection
- Presence of queen cells

I know that, generally speaking, July is late for colonies to swarm, but they can swarm then and they do. It would be a shame to lose half of your work force just when they're needed, so continue to be vigilant for the those swarm cells.



One vertical egg per cell, laid on the base

TOP SUPERING SUCCESSFUL IN EXTRACTED HONEY PRODUCTION

This colony was of normal strength on May 1, 1936, and wintered in a 1½ story hive. Top supering was used throughout the good honey flow. Top supering cannot be beaten if you have drawn combs. The colony produced 495 pounds not counting the honey in the cappings which was 20 pounds. We left 80 pounds on this colony for winter making a total of 595 pounds of honey produced in one season.—Fred Gould, Ohio.

Root QUALITY Bee Supplies

Page 4

Don't let it get this far.

Summer supering

Assuming everything is OK and your colony is not preparing to swarm, then you need to think about providing enough space for the bees to store the nectar. They may need more space than you think.

When nectar is brought into the hive it has a water content of about 80 per cent, and so needs a lot of space. The bees reduce its water content to about 18 per cent and then store and cap it, ready for use later by the bees—or in most cases, the beekeeper.

A very full super. Photo: The Apiarist

So, when do you put supers on? If you don't do it soon enough, you risk having it stored in the brood comb, reducing the availability for the queen to lay and possibly inducing the colony to prepare to swarm.

Too early or too many will reduce the bees' ability to maintain the right hive temperature suitable for raising brood or, because the warmest part of the colony is in the centre, only the frames above the brood will get filled with honey (known chimneying or the chimney effect).

So once the brood box has about seven to eight seams of bees, put on the first super, preferably with drawn comb. Once this super is 80 per cent full with nectar put the second one on, again preferably with drawn comb.

Super tips

Why drawn comb? Because it takes a lot of nectar to make wax—about 8kg of nectar for 1kg of wax—and you want to maximise the honey harvest. Sometimes you don't have drawn comb, so either get it drawn early in the season using a rapid feeder or wait until later when there is a flow on with plenty of nectar to go around.

Next, the vexed question of whether you put the new super on top of the original, or under the existing. For me, it makes sense to put the new super under the existing one. This gives the bees access to a lot of space and can reduce overcrowding in the brood box, it's nearer to the bees storing the nectar and it's warmer, right near the brood.

Lots of supers. Photo: Barnsley Beekeepers

July (cont.)

Honey harvesting

I think most of us use wired super frames and spin out the honey at harvest time leaving us with that ever so useful drawn comb.

However, there are other ways of harvesting and presenting your honey. The most straightforward method is using un-wired foundation and cutting out sections of capped honey: this is known as cut comb.

Purists say that the mid-rib in in this type of comb is too thick and suggest that a thin starter strip is used at the top of the frame allowing the bees to draw out the comb, giving a finer structure.

Or you could forego the sticky pleasure of cutting up the comb and use preformed sections. Again, this uses unwired foundation mounted into 100mm x100mm frames or 'sections'.

Honey bee on heather. Photo: Liam Olds

Section honey

These sections are arranged in rows of four or five across the specially made super, giving about 50 uniform sections to harvest.

Anecdotally, I understand that the bees are not very accepting of this arrangement and will store honey anywhere else until they have no choice, so it's not advisable to use a mixture of normal super frames and sections.

Heather or wildflower?

Most of us have to make do with the forage available—wild or cultivated flowers and blossoms in the fields and gardens near our apiaries. Having said that, it's very surprising to note the vast differences of these honeys, dependent on the time of harvest and the forage available.

I've seen some early harvests from Downland apiaries the colour of white Vinho Verde and a harvest from a more wooded area, the colour of used engine oil. If you are lucky enough to live in the north of our area or are organised enough to move your hives, you may get what some think is the best honey in the world: the fabled heather honey.

Whatever you harvest, I'm sure you will be proud of your achievements and that of your girls and share your bounty with friends and family.

Asian hornets

And finally, although we have had no sighting of the Asian Hornet (below) at the time of going to press in our area, please keep an eye out for the blighters in your wasp traps.

Another veiled beekeeper

How to sell your honey through B&L: it's easy and free

Our website shows a map of where our beekeepers work, and a contact form for the public to enquire about the purchase of local honey. The map was also posted on local Facebook pages.

This helps link our members with a growing community of honey connoisseurs.

Success stories

B&L trialled this last year with some success and some B&L members found it worked well for them. And I was contacted by a delicatessen in Hurstpierpoint and a bread shop in Kemptown, Brighton, who both wanted a supplier for local honey; there were also requests from individuals.

Other local BKAs, including High Weald and East Grinstead, are also selling local honey in a similar fashion.

How it works

You will be contacted by local businesses, or individuals keen to support local small businesses. As this sales method becomes known locally, the number of requests is likely to increase.

The address or email contact you print on the label can then be published on our website showing where your honey is produced. Alternatively, I am willing to be a point of contact and to pass enquiries on to those who are registered.

You can negotiate the price for your hard work, manage storage, delivery and sales for maximum convenience, and so make the best return for you and your bees.

What do I have to do?

To be part of this free venture, simply email Jude New.

Jude New

Graham Bubloz
Chairman

Words from the Chair

Where I am located (Brighton), I haven't seen a June gap —not yet anyway. Everything seems to be delayed. Honey production (for me) has been poor so far—perhaps things will pick up—and the recent warm spell of weather has certainly helped.

At a recent committee meeting, we discovered that our membership level has increased, and at the last count, we had 178. We're trying our best to keep everyone informed of news and developments in our patch and hopefully you're benefiting from the increased activity.

Socials

It's always worth coming along to the monthly Bee Chat evenings. They are casual and informal events – and the location moves every month. The next one is on Wednesday 5 July from 7.30pm at The Sportsman Pub, Goddards Green, BN6 9LQ. Keep an eye on the newsletter and our website for future events. Incidentally, these meetings are now being handled by Rachel Ramaker and Mat Budgen.

Making better contacts

We can help members of the public get in touch with their local beekeeper so they can buy local honey.

Take a look at our website for details – AND make sure that you contact Jude New to register for this service.

Whilst you're looking there, I'd like to draw your attention to a couple of areas on our website that you may not be very familiar with: For Sale / Out Apiary Offers and The Membership Directory. We receive occasional offers from members of the public to site bees on their property (see below). If you're struggling to keep bees at home, this could be a possible option for you. New places are added on an ad-hoc basis.

The membership directory is fairly self-explanatory – but it's not comprehensive. I'd love it if we could include ALL members on the list. You'll see that there is basic contact information shown – just a name, phone number, a town and a post code. If you can consent to be on the list, it would be a useful tool to allow everyone to see who's close by – to lend a hand etc. To do this, please contact the secretary (Norman Dickinson) to agree to be included in the next updated list. to complete.

Flat roof needs a beekeeper

A flat owner in Brighton would like bees kept on her roof, close to the sea front and Brighton Pier. Please contact Kate Gregory.

Manek Dubash
Asian Hornet
Team Co-ordinator

Asian Hornet report

News is coming in of a fourth 2023 sighting of an Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*) in Canterbury, Kent, but this has yet to be confirmed. Increased cross-Channel holiday trips this summer will boost the risk of more.

Asian hornet queens—the only ones capable of founding a new nest—are out flying much less now as the number of workers increases: queens spend more time laying eggs while workers forage. So as the year progresses, any *V. velutina* we spot are more likely to be workers. We have to hope that they're individuals rather than part of an established colony.

Jersey is once more making the news—literally as this news story accurately (for once!) highlights. The latest statistic is that the highly organised team there has captured or at least identified over 450 Asian hornet queens in 2023. It's an astonishing number—but each can found a nest full of thousands of hornets. So catching queens is clearly a priority. More power to their elbow.

Key Red: trapped; Yellow: caught/killed by member of the public; Purple: ID confirmed but escaped; White: plausible sighting; PN: Primary nest.

From our apiaries: Barcombe, Grassroots, Hove & Isfield

Barcombe

Oh no! it was all going so well and then….snap! There I was enjoying a mountain bike session in Surrey Hills when a bomb crater appeared suddenly in front of me. I tried to stop, honestly, but too late and I ended up tumbling down with the bike on top of me. Result one broken arm, and it's my right one!

Busted but thriving

So, first of all a massive thank you for all the kind offers of help and a special thank you to Ross Eager for helping me with my own bees and Manek for picking me up and helping transport me to Barcombe—all this right in the middle of prime swarming season. Mrs Toni has called me a few choice words!

So this month has been hard work, however the apiary has been thriving. The queen rearing has been a massive success. Fourteen queen cells have been raised from the calmness of Hive 10 and distributed as follows:

- The angry Hive 5 has been split into five separate colonies, with each given a new queen. Four of these have been successful, but one didn't mate properly so was merged with one of the other four. These should now expand before winter.
- The angry Hive 3 (daughter of Hive 5) has been re-queened. Two Apideas at Barcombe are thriving with now mated good queens.
- One cell was put in an Apidea in my own apiary which mated successfully and has taken over a queenless colony.
- Unmated queens were taken by Alex Smith (queen now successfully mated); Nigel Kermode and Julie Lawrence (four queen cells); Graham Bubloz (one).

If you've never attempted queen rearing, I strongly recommend that you have a go. If you don't know where to start, then get in touch with me or Jude as we will be doing this every year from now on.

In other news from Barcombe, after an interesting beginning of May where all colonies decided they no longer wanted their current queen, I can confirm that every colony is now queen-right again, so good news all round!

Pictures from 21 June: see page 7!

Tony Birkbeck, Apiary Manager

Grassroots

According to my notes, there was a release of virgin queens at Grassroots.

There were some donations of virgin queens from Ben Castle and Adrien Parker. Ben's queen was checked for disease by Bee Inspectors Diane Steele and Dan Morgan and passed with flying colours. I put the virgin into an Apidea with a 250-300ml of young bees, closed them up and kept them in the dark for three days and two nights, spraying with water daily once or twice.

The new queen marked. Spot the bee to the bottom right, she was also in the crown of thorns! Photo: Heidi

Inside a failed Apidea: long story, buy me a pint of soda and lime next Bee Chat!

I was also donated a couple of queen cells from Adrien's bees at Emmaus. I put these in an incubator until they emerged, at which point they were put into an Apidea with the same regime of spraying and being kept in the dark. By Sunday 21 May they were all ready to be released to start their mating flights.

I was very proud: I haven't raised an Apidea with a ready emerged virgin before, nor used an incubator for queen cells before.

Novice Beekeepers visit

The Novice Beekeepers came to Grassroots: we re-marked a queen, who had been marked with a white spot because I lost my red Posca pen, with a red pen.

She now has a bull's eye behind her head and is laying well. I demonstrated by marking a drone and clipped his wing, using a crown of thorns to hold him.

Continued overleaf…

From our apiaries: Barcombe, Grassroots, Hove & Isfield

Grassroots (cont.)

Jude's new grafting gear

We continue with a disease inspection of another hive. A good session at Grassroots.

Graham and I prepared three nuclei of bees, and moved them to Hove to take up residence in the newly landscaped gardens of our host Joy Chittendon, who is happy to see bees back in her garden. Some new members visited Hove Apiary to see the bees the following weekend. Their pictures were posted on Facebook.

Dan Morgan, our new bee inspector, inspected all the full hives, finding all but one queen-right. Finding and clipping the queens is next. Fingers crossed that all hives will be queen-right by next inspection.

Basic Assessment

In mid-June, the Basic Assessment Group visited Grassroots. One of the practicals is to light a smoker which will stay alight for 30 minutes. We practised that, discussing what fuel to use, what order to put it into the smoker, when to light it, how much to use the bellows, how to cool the smoke...

Other points on the syllabus we completed were stating the reason for opening the hive, and distinguishing between stores and brood, worker brood, drone brood and queen cells (if any!) in the brood box. We also looked through two nuclei which were questionably queen-right and discussed how to find out.

We examined the frames with our naked eyes, with a torch, and with my new magnifying glasses (see photo, left). We found eggs in one, so we put a frame of brood in all stages (BIAS) into the nucleus which didn't have eggs—and now our fingers are crossed.

Jude New, Apiary Manager

Isfield

Not a great deal to report this month. The apiary has expanded to five hives, up from three over winter. The two additions are from splits of an existing hive and a swarm taken in late May.

I have maintained one hive on double brood ready to provide larvae and use as a incubator for future queen rearing. Having said that, our earlier queen rearing endeavours were a complete disaster. Admittedly we only grafted six larvae but none of them were accepted and the bees decided to build brace comb across the whole frame—see photos, left.

We will try again a bit later in the month when things like swarming have calmed down. You never know, we may have queens ready to use for over wintering nucs this year.

Ian White, Apiary Manager

Ian grafting larvae in the shed at Isfield. Photo: Graham Bubloz

Ian hoped the bees had drawn out the grafted cells but the girls had other ideas. Photo: Graham Bubloz

From our apiaries: Barcombe Apiary photo extra

These superb pictures were taken by Alex Smith at Barcombe Apiary on 21 June. A swarm, led by a clipped queen, has set up home under the floor. Also, check the clear image of a varroa mite on a larva. Caption competition for the look on Tony's face?

The war against varroa: are we winning?

Although drawn from a US website with many US-specific references, this article gives a useful overview of the origins of varroa, and some insights into methods of and treatments for combatting varroa

The varroa bee mite (*Varroa jacobsoni*) was first discovered by A.C. Oudemans in 1904, as a parasite of the Asian honey bee, *Apis cerana*. In the late 1940s, Through movement of the western honey bee, *Apis mellifera*, colonies into and out of Asia, varroa mites became established on honey bees first in Africa and then in Europe.

Quickly, it spread around the world. Only one continent, Australia, remains free of the mite, however, it is expected to be introduced in the near future and the continent continues to have scares about various reports of the mite.

It is now known that at least five species (18 haplotypes) of varroa mites can be found in the tropics and Dr. Denis Anderson, an Australian researcher, has renamed the specific mite—Korean in origin—*V. destructor*. This concept of renaming organisms might become more common in the future as DNA technology improves.

Varroa continues to be considered the most devastating parasite of honey bee colonies in existence. The mite is absolutely dependent on the honey bee and cannot complete its life cycle without being in contact with honey bees. Check out this Youtube video. The mite's complicated life cycle is also well described in a number of print publications.

One reason the mite is so damaging is that it is relatively new to the Western honey bee (*A. mellifera*). Most parasites have evolved mechanisms so that they do not kill their hosts, which is in the long run disadvantageous. Thus, the original host, *A. cerana*, is somewhat resistant to predation by mites. However in temperate areas, almost every *A. mellifera* colony infested by varroa will be killed unless there is intervention to reduce the mite population.

Fighting back

There is mounting evidence, however, that certain European honey bees and other populations might be somewhat resistant/tolerant, and incipient breeding programs exist to cultivate and enhance this trait. At the moment the Russian Honey Bee Breeding Programme and those based on removal of mites through colony hygiene are the most promising. Read Randy Oliver's ideas on the possibility of breeding honey bees more resistant to varroa now and in the future.

Detection of varroa can be accomplished by several methods. Most regulatory agencies [in the US] use the "ether roll." A sample of bees is put in a glass jar and a squirt of ether mixture (commercially available engine-starting fluid) added. The jar is agitated and the mites stick to the sides. The sugar shake doesn't kill honey bees appears to work for detection but not treatment. Beekeepers can also visually examine the brood (capped brood is best) and/or hive debris that has fallen on the bottom board covered with sticky white paper. See a rather complete hive examination by Scientific Beekeeping's Randy Oliver here.

A variety of methods

Very little information exists on determining the beginnings of a varroa infestation and subsequent thresholds for treatment. Varroa mite infestation is both a honey bee and beekeeping community issue and treatments should be tailored to this fact.

Many beekeepers prefer to use no chemical treatment. Treatments continue to evolve over the years as mites have become resistant to specific materials. In addition, the use of so-called "soft chemicals," such as essential oils and/or organic acids are now considered feasible approaches.

However, only those currently approved by the Veterinary Medicines Agency [in the USA] are legal. Continued use of materials is a big problem. Varroa has become resistant to many of the earlier introduced substances, such as Amitraz.

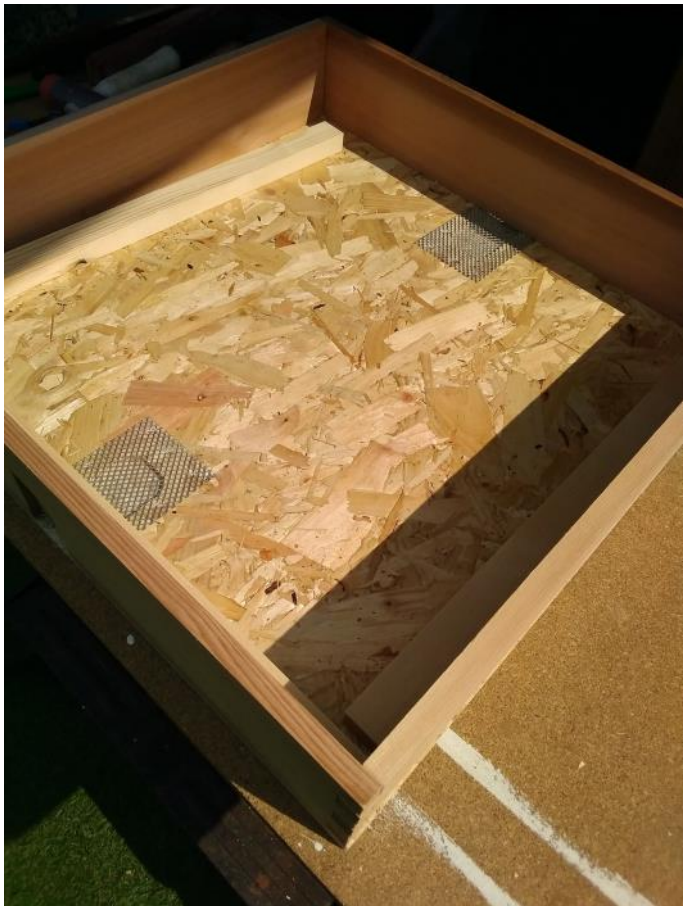
A new technology on the horizon known as RNAi may have some utility in the future as a "silver bullet." However, this is only a dream at the moment. Treatment still relies on a delicate balancing act. As one wag put it, "it's not easy killing a bug on a bug without killing both."

The Apis Information Center

Swarm collection: a clean sweep

The story of a swarm found in a shed at Rose Hill—but wrapped around a broom head.
Clockwise from top left: 1. They had built wild comb around a broom head. You can see the handle quite clearly. 2 & 3. Broom removed still with comb attached. Held by Hilary who had the job of fitting the wild comb into national frames. 4. Still a bit more comb to go and just a few bees. It took us three hours to get it out and into a double nuc. Thanks to Hilary for her hoover. Words & photos by Ian White.

Flatpack workshop with Ross Eager



Sandpaper, cedar hive parts and Bear the dog with bees. What more could you want?! Today was the first flatpack construction workshop. We made a shallow National roof and a national super in just over three hours. The maestro in this instance was Ross. He has a very well-equipped workshop and is willing to supervise three participants at a time. Bottom right: super and roof in place on a hive with a new queen at Grassroots Apiary today (6 June). Words & photos by Jude New.

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.

Spring/summer apiary meetings

Date	Location	Topic
2 July	Hove (José)	Mid-summer inspection
16 July	Cooksbridge (Ian)	Mid-summer inspection
29 July	Barcombe (Tony)	Honey management
30 July	Isfield (Ian)	Honey management

Bee Chats

Wednesday 5 July, 7.30pm, The Sportsman, Goddards Green

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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