

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers

A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

AGM & HONEY SHOW
Wednesday 21 February, 7pm

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2024

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EDITORIAL



B&L's Christmas meal. Photo: Graham Bubloz

We made a splash at the Cote Brasserie in Brighton just before Christmas, with over 20 members enjoying a feast with a drop or two of accompanying refreshments. [A good time was had](#) but I'd hope to see more of us there next year.

Asian hornets: what we can do

There's detail about the BBKA's initiatives in [my report on page 3](#)—but I wanted to add that, on the B&L Buzz WhatsApp group, there's terrific load of self-help regarding trapping and other practical things we can do to help reduce the impact of this invasive species on our bees in 2024 and beyond. Do check it out.

Two more things I'd like to bring to your attention:

1. I sent out a call for members to join the Asian Hornet Action Team (AHAT) and I'm delighted to say that 10 members have joined the team. Please join us. It's easy to do: just complete a [simple training questionnaire](#). The core task is essentially helping the public identify the AH and explaining how to report the insect should they see one.
2. An online 'wash-up' meeting on 27 November, organised by the BBKA with 345 participants, brought up a range of interesting and useful ideas on how to raise awareness among other actions we could take. Among the suggestions was to have notifications sent out with council tax demands. Your view? Short form: there's a lot of preparatory work going on for 2024.

AGM & Honey Show

Next month, 21 February, sees our annual Honey Show taking place alongside the AGM. Details are on [page 4](#).

However, we will need a couple more people to step up in 2024 as Chairman Graham is stepping down after three years in post, and Bob, our Meetings Secretary who works tirelessly in the background, is also stepping down. We need volunteers.

To know more about these roles, please contact anyone on the committee.

Manek Dubash, Editor

EVENTS

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

NEXT MONTH

- AGM & Honey Show
- 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 January

January is quiet, but just keep your bees on the right side of starvation. The National Bee Unit usually issues its reminder to check for sufficient food for the bees this month.

Hefting is important. In early winter, the hive should be nearly too heavy to lift with one hand but by now it should be feeling lighter. Is it too light? If in doubt, replace the pack of fondant directly on top of the brood frames above the cluster, ensuring the bees are directly below.



Keep your fondant moist with clingfilm, or put it in a take-away meal container

Keeping them warm

Wrap clingfilm over any exposed sides of the fondant block to keep it moist. There is also a case for putting insulation over the fondant and below the crown board. Put foam insulation, such as a 25mm or preferably 50mm block of Ecotherm under the roof to keep the heat in. Cut the block so it just fits and wrap the edges in duct tape. This keeps it from shedding particles and helps it survive year after year.

Try installing a transparent glass/plastic quilt (a posh name for crown board). This allows you to check on the bees without releasing the heat they work so hard to generate. It's not a good idea to open the brood box at this time of year but to see the bees clustering is quite fascinating.

Non-beekeepers ask me if bees hibernate. To which I reply: no, they behave like penguins in the Antarctic. The cluster centre can be between 18-32°C with an outside temperature of 9-14°C. The bees generate heat by flexing their flight muscles and the cooler ones

work their way into the centre and swap places with the warmer bees.

However, if the temperature of bees on the outside of the cluster falls below 9°C, they can start to die and fall off. If this happens in any great numbers, it could alter the mass of the cluster and start a cascade event that could see the colony dying out completely.

With daytime temperatures at 10°C or lower, the bees will only be taking cleansing flights on still, sunny days. They can store faecal matter for up to six weeks, so it's not a good idea to hang your washing out on these days.

Varroa treatment

Varroa treatment, if not already carried out, should be a top priority. The mites are uniquely vulnerable at this time of year as there are few or no occupied brood cells for them to breed in.

Now is a good time to put the hives where they provide the best aspect for the bees and your management, not just the first clear space you found last summer. With the temperature so low you can move your bees without applying the 'three feet or three miles' rule because by the time the bees re-emerge in the spring their internal compasses will have reset.

Apiary management

Get the strimmer and hedge cutter out and carry out ground maintenance around your hives, especially if you have an out-apiary and you're fed up with wading through hip-high brambles. If we get snow, you'll need to keep hive entrances clear so the bees can conduct cleansing flights and dispose of the dead bodies. Dead bees being disposed of are, within reason, a good sign, as it shows that



Using a [GasVap](#) reduces the varroa load.

housekeeping activity is going on and the colony is alive and well.

A hefty windstorm should prompt a quick trip to the apiary to check that the hives are still upright and on their stands. Strapping or concrete blocks should be used if they're in an exposed location. If I don't see the odd bee flying when I visit the apiary, I tend to tap the hive and put my ear against the side of the hive to check that I can still hear the buzz; I find it incredibly reassuring.



The boxes were upside down and badly warped, but the bees were fine.

It's also a good time to look for new apiary sites; with all the leaves off the trees and bushes you can see those unused corners of fields and gardens. Or if you've already identified a site, start setting it up now: don't wait until the start of the season or when there are swarms starting to emerge.

In summary

- Heft hives and feed if required
- Carry out oxalic acid treatment.
- Make a plan for next season. Expansion; queen rearing; honey production.
- Order any tools and equipment you will need to carry out the plan
- Clean and repair spare boxes, frames, floors, roofs, and crown boards.
- Make up frames ready to insert foundation later in the spring
- Clear new and existing apiary sites
- Make new [hive stands](#).
- Make sure sites are secure against both people and livestock
- Look forward to a better season!

The Veiled Beekeeper



*Graham Bubloz
Chairman*

Words from the Chair

I wish you a very Happy New Year.

We held our Christmas Meal at Cote Brasserie, Brighton on 12 December. It was lovely to catch up with everyone and I know that those who came along, had a great time. If you couldn't make it, the photos elsewhere will give you a flavour of what you missed. My thanks go to Jude for organising the whole thing and to Jeff Rodrigues who compiled a challenging quiz (based on Module 5 syllabus) and who also supplied bottles of wine from his own cellar as prizes.

Asian Hornets 2024

Our attention needs to be focused on doing what we can to try and combat the Asian Hornet threat. There are initiatives from our own Association (we're one of five divisions in the Sussex BKA) and Manek invited members to enrol for an Asian Hornet Action team. If you haven't done it yet, please take a look at [this BBKA page](#) and register (it takes five mins).

Events

Our next monthly meeting is titled "Rewilding – a personal view" by Neil Hulme a local freelance ecologist, who advises the Knepp Estate, among others. Please come along at 7.15pm ready for a 7.30pm start, on

Wednesday 17 January at The Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Lewes, BN7 2LR.

The following month is the Brighton & Lewes BKA Annual General Meeting and Honey Show on Wednesday 21 February. The entry forms and other documentation will be sent out shortly—and full details are on this newsletter, [overleaf](#).

Sits vac

From February, we shall need someone to take on the following roles: Chair; Meeting Secretary; and Librarian. Please consider helping with these roles, contact me ASAP

Training & mentoring

Jude is organising training again for 2024. This year, there should be training for absolute beginners, plus a 'taster' day; 'stage 2' of beekeeping—to help anyone who's keen to take their 'basic assessment'; and a 'general husbandry' course. Please refer to the training page on the B&L website for details.

Finally, we're seeking some help from our more established members to aid newer beekeepers to get started and to offer some practical help and guidance. Please have a quiet word with me at any of the monthly meetings if you might be able to help.



*Manek Dubash
Asian Hornet
Team Co-ordinator*

Asian Hornet report

The fight against the AH is stepping up. While there's little or no sign of additional resources being made available from Defra, the BBKA has made several initiatives.

1. An Outreach Officer post will be created with the purpose of developing external contacts to help the BBKA tackle key issues, with special focus on Asian Hornets but also including issues such as honey authenticity or neonicotinoids. Interested? The BBKA emailed every member with details, or check [indeed.com](#).

2. The BBKA will submit an emergency proposition to the Annual Delegates Meeting on 13 January seeking a levy on members to raise additional funds for AH publicity and awareness campaigns.

3. BBKA is to create a risk assessment for monitoring, and tracking & tracing Asian

hornets,, and will clarify with insurers what cover is provided for registered members undertaking this work.

4. The AH map on the BBKA website will become two: an AH co-ordinator map in the public domain; and an AH verifier map for association/branch use only.

5. [Compiling resources](#) that for associations and adding a 'Publicity Ideas' section giving costing and contact details for eg bus adverts, bus stop adverts, cinema advertising etc.

6. An order has been placed for an adult sized AH costume. Once delivered, details will be circulated of how this can be borrowed from BBKA.

To help, please consider joining the Asian Hornet Action Team—[details here](#)—for what is likely to be a busy year.

AGM & Honey Show: Wednesday 21 February 2024 at 7pm

The Annual General Meeting will take place during judging for the Honey Show.

Venue: Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Eastgate Street, Lewes BN7 2LR

Invitation to submit

Are you prepared for the B&L Honey Show?

There is still time to make a nice set of candles, sort and select your best photographs and select put aside your best jars of honey. If you feel adventurous you could try designing a new label for yourself or showing us a new gadget you have made to improve your beekeeping.

New Gadget Class

The Gadget Class is new this year and will be run after the AGM. This is a fun class to show us how clever you can be. To enter, you need to have made an improvement to an existing piece of kit or designed something new that will improve your beekeeping. As long as it's your idea there is no restriction on what you can bring (but it must fit through the door!). You will be given

the chance to explain your gadget to the audience and they will vote for the one they like best. There will be a certificate for the winner.

If you haven't entered before, please give it a go, you never know you might be a winner. It's just a great way to improve your appreciation of your hobby.

Bob Curtis, Meetings Secretary

How to apply

Email your Entry Form and Photographs by Tuesday 6 February 2024 for free entry to all classes to Bob Curtis: poshpix@me.com

Bring your entries for Classes 1-9 to the AGM/Honey Show at 7pm. On the night entry fee is £1.00 per class.

Photographs for Classes 10 & 11 must be submitted digitally to Bob Curtis: poshpix@me.com

Schedule for Classes

- Class 1: One 1lb Jar Clear Honey
- Class 2: One 1lb Jar Naturally Crystallised honey
- Class 3: Two 1lb Jars of similar honey

- Class 4: One Honey Jar Label of your own design on an empty 1lb jar
- Class 5: One Moulded candle
- Class 6: One 1oz block of wax
- Class 7: One Honey Cake: As per the recipe below
- Class 8: Six Honey Biscuits: Your own recipe to be provided with biscuits
- Class 9: A wax wrap big enough to covering an orange or similar
- Class 10: A bee related photograph
- Class 11: A close-up shot of a bee
- Class 12: An invention relating to beekeeping or the bee hive (Fun Class—does not contribute to final point, and judged by the audience).

Prizes

Points are awarded for each class. The member with the most points across classes 1 to 11 will be awarded the Dixon Hurst Cup.

- 1st prize: 5 points
- 2nd prize: 3 points
- 3rd prize: 2 points

The Novice with the highest points will be awarded the Novice Tray, awarded to the person with the most points who has not won a first place in a previous B&L Honey Show.

The Best Honey Cake will win the Honey Cake Salver.

Rules

- All classes may only be entered by individual members of B&L.
- No entry fee for classes with Entry Forms received by Tuesday 6 February 2024, otherwise £1.00 per Class.
- Classes 1-3, 5-6, & 9-11: maximum two entries, only your highest score counts for the Dixon Hurst Cup.
- Class 4: One Honey Jar Label of your own design on an empty 1lb jar (max. one entry).
- Classes 5 & 6 & 9: The Wax must come from your own apiary.
- Classes 7 & 8: Maximum one entry
- Honey: must be from the member's apiary.
- Jars: must be unlabelled, 1lb glass jars with gold lid (except for class 4).

- Cakes and biscuits: to be presented on a plate and covered with cling film. (The Honey used should be from the member's own apiary or locally produced honey.)
- Classes 10 & 11: Photographs to be submitted digitally preferably jpg. Max 4MB; larger files accepted if sent by email. All entries remain the copyright of the author. Entries may be used in the B&L newsletter and website and will be credited to the author.

Recipe for Class 7

Honey Fruit Cake must be made using this recipe:

Ingredients

- 50g Honey
- Two eggs
- 150g SR Flour
- 60g Demerara sugar
- 200g butter or margarine
- 200g mixed fruit
- 1 tablespoon milk

Method

- Put honey, sugar and milk together in a warm place and leave until honey is dissolved. Beat in remainder of ingredients.
- Bake in cool oven for about 1¼ hours at 150°C, Gas Mark 2 (this time and temperature is only a guide).
- Size of round tin to be used should not exceed 7½" (19cm) diameter.

Apiary report: Grassroots

We did the oxalic acid trickle treatment today, 17 December. It was a still and warm day at 10 degrees. The syrup was warm and mixed with the Api-Bioxal crystals. We opened the hives for the minimum time, just long enough to trickle the treatment between the frames and close up again.

Some colonies needed to be persuaded that Api-Bioxal was necessary today. They responded to the smoker. Katherine did get a couple in her veil but not stung.

The nucs were given half measure, the full hives 50ml each. I chose a time which was forecast to be dry and just 10 degrees. I thought that this would prevent the brood becoming too cold for the bees to comfortably re-heat.

The treatment does not need to be repeated. I chose a time when the colonies are broodless or in a couple of cases (in the poly hives) mostly broodless. If I find that there is a high varroa count early in the spring, I will look at my options and intend to start the apiary with a Bailey comb change so that all the frames are replaced at the same time and any nosema, or chemical residue is removed from the colony for the new season.

All I need to check now is the amount of stores in each hive for the rest of the winter and early spring. I estimate that I will check for stores about once every two or three weeks. I can see through the poly hives' clear crown boards whether the fondant needs topping up, and the hives which have supers of stores will be given fondant when the stores are used up.

Katherine was tasked with filling the syringe, Mim took the pictures and Ben and Heidi supported as necessary!

Jude New, Apiary Manager



Brighton & Lewes Christmas Meal: a fun time was had by all



Just a sample from the B&L Christmas meal at Cote on Tuesday 12 December. Nigel's hat (top right) was star of the show. 'Gentlemen...shall think themselves accursed they were not here...' Photos: Graham B & Manek D.

Feral bees and an altered nuc



Sent in by Gerald Legg, this lovely photo, taken last October, shows feral bees in a hollow oak, in Sompting. Photo by Paul Parsons.



Left: I removed the feeder from a Payne's nuc because I found the bees would either fill it with brace comb or drown in syrup in there, despite the wooden float. So rather than seal it off, I decided to use the space to make an eight-frame nuc.

Using a multi-tool, I cut away the feeder, using the blocks of poly and plenty of PVA glue to fill any gaps, leaving no space for pests such as wax moths to hide. Feeding can still be done using a Payne's top feeder.

Manek Dubash



B&L Events 2023-24

Winter meetings

Date	Speaker(s)	Topic
Wed 17 January	Neil Hulme	Rewilding—A Personal View
Wed 21 February		AGM & Honey Show
Wed 20 March	Pam Hunter	Poisonous Honey
Wed 17 April	Francis Ratnieks	TBD

Next Bee Chat

TBD

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.

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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- **Grassroots:** Jude New

- **Hove:** Felicity Alder & José Reina

- **Isfield:** Ian White

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National Honey Show Rep: Vacant

* Stepping down in 2024