

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER AUGUST 2024

CONTENTS

[Seasonal hints & tips](#) 2

- Harvest time!

[News from the Division](#) 4

- Asian Hornet report
- Mentoring—why mentor?

- Fancy a wax workshop?

- Out-apiary meetings—with photos

[Meetings and contacts](#) 7

- Out-apiary meetings and other, bee-related events

EDITORIAL

Beekeeping can be such a relaxing and satisfying hobby. A lovely bee chat evening outside a local pub, photos from the Facebook and WhatsApp Buzz groups, and the bucolic scent of—bananas! Yes, the bee alarm pheromone, so removing supers was a little fraught this week (late July). And from my most productive hive too.

That aside, joining B&L was the best thing I did when I started beekeeping, and encouraging others to join their local BKA is the advice I offer to those asking for help.

One of the benefits of this association (and of others) is mentoring—and we're looking for mentors, so if you can spare a

little time to help new beekeepers become better beekeepers, please let Jude know. There's more on this [inside](#).

Back to the harvest; all my supers were out in the field this year and I had to harvest as the bees were backfilling the hives with honey. So for the first time in years, I had to buy more supers and foundation; at least the flow will ensure the frames get drawn—nothing is more valuable than drawn super comb.

I hope your harvest goes well and that you get a break over the summer.

Manek Dubash, Editor

EVENTS

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

NEXT MONTH

- Seasonal hints & tips
- Asian hornet update
- News updates
- Latest events

SHARE YOUR PHOTOS AND STORIES

RIP MIKE JAMES

We are shocked and sorry to announce that Mike James, maker of beekeeping equipment and known to many in B&L, passed away on 10 July for reasons that are, so far unexplained. Our condolences have been expressed to Vivienne, his widow.

August events & meetings

Date	Location	Time	Leader	Topic
Saturday 3rd	Rottingdean Fair	10.00-16.00	Nigel	Fair Stand and Display
Saturday 3rd	Maresfield		Tony	Open hive: honey extraction
Sunday 11th	Hove	13.30-16.00	Jose	Honey management & winter prep / varroa treatment
Sunday 18th	Rottingdean	11.00-14.00	Jeff	Honey management & winter prep / varroa treatment
Saturday 31st	Cooksbridge	13.30-16.00	Ian	Honey management & winter prep / varroa treatment

Legend

Outside events

Training events

Out-apiary meetings

Out-apiary meetings start at 13.30 and run until about 16.00, unless otherwise indicated. Apiary locations are on [the website](#). Bring a mug for tea!

Next Bee Chat: TBD

ONLINE



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QR link to our website

Seasonal tips for August: harvest time

It's been a swarmy year so far, no doubt. 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.

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 clearer board 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. Don't just leave an empty super on top or they will very quickly fill it with comb, unless you manage to extract and replace on the same day or within 24 hours, tops.



Rhombus clearer board

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 (see photo below); they're available online fairly cheaply. 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



A refractometer

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



Varroa parasitising a bee



Manek Dubash
Asian Hornet
Team Co-ordinator

Asian Hornet report

Last month I wrote: *“we’re in the period when the AH queens have more or less stopped flying and are instead concentrating on building the primary nests and laying eggs, and the workers have yet to emerge en masse to start preying on our bees and other pollinators.”*

Well, we’re still waiting for reports of *Vespa velutina* in our area; in fact there’s been an ominous silence even from Kent in recent weeks.

So now is the time to make plans for where you’ll put those Asian hornet traps and what you’ll bait them with.

Lids for traps that fit supermarket jam jars are available from [Jude New](#) at £1 each. For bait use Trappit; one member reported that a tiny amount attracted dozens of hornets—and other flying insects. So beware that jars are likely to be non-selective: you don’t want to trap anything other than Asian hornets.

Help with identification

In the meantime, we have publicity materials to help people with identification, a time that cannot be far away. People are primed now to look for hornets: let’s help!

Mentoring—why mentor?

What better way to help new beekeepers? Contact [Jude](#) to become a mentor

According to the Association for Talent Development, mentoring is neither coaching nor counselling. “Mentoring relationships are based upon advice-giving and direction while coaching is not”, says the website.

Rather, a mentor is a trusted individual with experience who can:

- help others develop their skills and knowledge
- share their story and bring you into the local network
- support you to set goals and take action
- help you to look at challenges in a new way
- signpost you to advice and further help if you need it

At least, that’s how the government frames it, basing its advice on a work context.

From a beekeeping perspective, I’ve found mentoring to be a very pleasant and enjoyable experience.

I remember my first steps—not so long ago—when I started beekeeping. Though I’d been thinking about it on and off for decades, I only started researching beekeeping seriously during the season before I acquired bees. And now, while mentoring, I’ve been reminded of just how daunting

looking after bees for the first time can be.

I still make more than my fair share of mistakes (least said soonest mended) and have lots still to learn, but now it’s right to pay back the time and effort that members of B&L put into helping me make those baby steps.

Becoming a mentor

If you have passed your Basic Assessment and/or have three or more years of beekeeping experience, you too can be a mentor.

You’d be following in venerable footsteps: Homer’s *The Odyssey* chronicles Odysseus’s journey home after the Trojan War. During those years, the goddess Athena appears to his son, Telemachus, in the form of an old family friend, Mentor, to offer him support and guidance in his father’s absence. Their interactions in *The Odyssey* represent one of the earliest antecedents of the word ‘mentorship’.

It’s about guidance and involves as much or as little time as you and your mentee(s) care to devote to it. Go and look at someone else’s bees and you could learn something new too.

Manek Dubash

Wax workshop?

Do you fancy a day with wax?

We have a question for you: would you be interested if we arrange wax workshops this autumn?

In October (morning session) or November (afternoon session) at the moment. Each session is planned to last 3 hours, hall availability is already an issue. There will be a charge for materials, and opportunities to make a range of items with beeswax. We will have a pop up honey shop so if you have honey to sell you will be able to bring that along too. Please [contact me](#).

Jude New, Training Co-ordinator



Out-apiary meetings

Barcombe



I'll start with a moan: will it ever stop raining? Why does the grass and hedges grow so fast at Barcombe? Why are the bees constantly annoying me by making queen cells? Why are there such things as mice, and why do you always run out of super frames just at the wrong time?

Right, now I have all that off my mind I have to say that July hasn't turned out too badly, we have had a strong summer flow and the blackberry has been responsible for most of it.

The flow is on!

I noticed the blackberry started flowering this year in May whereas previous years I've always thought it was the first week of June. I'm typing this report on the 18th July and most of the blackberry where I live is now in fruit and not a flower in sight yet the flow is still going strong—in fact I caught a swarm in Uckfield on the 16th and put it in a nuc with very dry drawn-out frames. When I went to have a look the very next morning the bees had already rammed two of the frames full of nectar!

So I'm hoping that Barcombe will have a bit of honey this year following a disastrous spring—I should know next month.

Apiary meeting

We had an excellent apiary meeting on the 14th July with 14 people who were treated to an exciting agenda of activity. We started by doing an alcohol wash on a sample of 200 bees from the notorious hive 5 whose bees were,

surprisingly, very calm about the whole affair.

Hive 5 hasn't done anything this year; in previous years it's been one of the busiest hives at Barcombe (hence its reputation) but this year the bees still haven't really built up to size so I thought it would be interesting to see if varroa was the cause.

The results surprised me: we had a zero count. I'm not sure everyone was excited as I about killing 200 bees for the good of the colony but I think most went away contemplating buying the products to use on their hives.

Splitting

We then did another split, but with a difference. Hive 10 had been producing queen cells for a while which I had just been removing simply to buy some time until the apiary day.

Sure enough, there were about 10 or so queen cells in there. I had left the hive uninspected for 11 days so I knew the oldest cell could have been 15 days old if they had upgraded a newly hatched larva into a queen the moment I shut them up. The old queen had gone, but she was clipped, so likely just fell on the floor and the swarming bees returned to the hive without her.



We took four frames of emerging brood and two of stores, put them in a nuc and added fresh frames of drawn-out comb into the old hive. Then, we removed two mated queens from the Apideas at Barcombe and introduced these into the two split colonies using Butler cages. Lastly we removed all queen cells but two which were carefully cut out and put into the Apideas that we took the queens from.

Hopefully, they will hatch out in the next couple of days mate successfully. I checked the next day and both colonies had accepted their new queens.

Bee chat

Discussion after the event took place in the car park with most people very impressed with the use of Apideas and their benefits.

I'm also sorry to say that it wasn't just 200 bees that perished because of me at Barcombe this month. The pesky mice that have ruined quite a few things in the shed are very likely to have perished by now after I had left them some "special" treats. I'm still trying to find some time to empty the shed and record the damage, but I think that will have to wait a while as it's only a couple of weeks before I disappear on yet another holiday!

With luck, next month we will all be talking about honey.

Finally, a massive thanks to Graham for providing the refreshments and cakes.

*Tony Birkbeck, Apiary manager
Photos by Mim (more overleaf)*

Out-apiary meetings

Barcombe (continued)



Great photos that tell the stories in Tony's Barcombe report: an alcohol wash to check for varroa, and transferring a queen into an Apidea. More on the WhatsApp Buzz group.

Photos by Mim

Out-apiary meetings

Rottingdean



Well, it has been a busy month after a slow start to the season [*same here! MD*] and we've been up and down to the apiary several times a week.

Two hives have been so fast to grow and shown signs of swarming preparation that we've had to make three splits, using the vertical split method. So, potentially and given a fair wind, we should end up with six colonies up there—we started out with three with one looking weak—or at least colonies that we can merge later in the year.

A split before the end of July would normally be a bit risky but given such a late start plus longer summers a virgin queen ready to mate in 5/6 weeks still gives the queen several weeks of laying time. Especially if you choose frames with almost mature queen cells into the split, which is what I did.

Swarming?

We've avoided any swarming so far.

Whether we can harvest honey in time for the B&L stall in Rottingdean Village Fair on 3rd August is touch and go, but I'm hopeful.

Help required

We're planning to plant a long row of lavender adjacent and parallel to the apiary to flower next summer and we need to do some stepped sections in the slope of the apiary plus we might

get our shed erected...so work for the autumn and helpers would be sooo welcome!

Meetings

We only had one taker (plus one too-late) for the Open Apiary meeting in July so I cancelled. Only one too for the June Open Apiary, though I went ahead on that occasion.

The August Open will be on Sunday 18 August at 11am. We can look at how the splits are doing, do an alcohol wash to check for varroa, perhaps use a clearing board for any frames with honey ready for extraction. I have some spare suits to lend too if needed.

But you must let me know if you want to come by the Friday before, by text on 07711 554811 or [email me](#).

Jeff Rodrigues, Apiary Manager

Photos: (above left) Poppies and field of linseed in the far background; (below) sheep grazing amidst poppies and blue linseed.

Photos by Jeff





B&L Events, August 2024

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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).

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Disclaimer: 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.