

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER OCTOBER 2024

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EDITORIAL

The harvest is done, the varroa treatment is about to end and it's time to start the serious preparations for winter. As far as I'm concerned, wind protection for my Wilmington apiary will be crucial as I lost all my colonies there last winter due to exposure to heavy rain and high winds, as the weather came whistling in off the Downs. Then there's the nadiring of supers, a life-saver in my experience.

In this issue, you'll find our regular feature on seasonal tips—please let me know what you think of it—and an extended Asian Hornet Report, with lots of

details about recent nest discoveries and a highly useful update from Defra.

We also report on our first winter meeting under the regime of Nigel Kermode, our new Meetings Secretary, along with out-apiary updates and triumphs for B&L at the South of England Agricultural Show.

Finally, contrary to my mistake last month, all our winter meetings are **live**: none are online only—see below. Apologies to Nigel (and his blood pressure!).

Manek Dubash, Editor

Winter meetings

Date	Location	Topic
Wednesday 18 Sept	Live	How was your beekeeping season? Short talks plus Q&A
Wednesday 16 Oct	Live	From Buckfast to Buckingham Palace, plus rare bees, by Richard Rickitt
Wednesday 20 Nov	Live	Let's get ready for the Honey Show: judging standards, by Gerald, Jude & Bob
Wednesday 18 Dec	Live	Must-haves vs nice-to-haves—Perspectives from a commercial beekeeper, by Dan & Ken Basterfield
Wednesday 15 Jan	Live	How to keep your bees in the best of health, by Margaret Murdin
Wednesday 19 Feb	Live	2025 AGM and Honey Show
Wednesday 19 March	Live	The role of drones & drone congregation areas, by Stephen Fleming
Wednesday 16 April	Live	The special language of bees, by Margaret Murdin

- All meetings are LIVE and start at 1915 for 1930, at Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Lewes BN7 2LR

Next Bee Chat: TBD

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

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 October: winter is coming

Medication

Not yours: the bees'. All summer treatments should now be done.

The Veterinary Medicines Regulations 2013 sets out legal text on the manufacture, authorisation, marketing, distribution and post-authorisation surveillance of veterinary medicines. Our bees are classed as a food-producing animal and therefore beekeepers, especially those who sell their honey via a third party, must comply with these regulations. The most important of these is the keeping of a medicine record card.

Record-keeping

The regulations say: "Beekeepers must keep documentation containing details of veterinary medicinal products administered in colonies for at least five years, irrespective of whether or not the colony concerned is no longer in that keeper's possession or has died during that period." A standard form is available [here](#).

It goes on to say that the use of generic substances such as oxalic acid or self-made thymol solutions should not be used. If traces are found during routine honey sampling, which the Bee Inspector may take when visiting you during a routine EFB inspection, beekeepers are liable for prosecution. It is also important to note that some products available on beekeeping manufacturers' websites are not registered medicinal products and



Approved medicines only, please



Cleaning: use cold/tepid water first, then hot water with soda

although available, should not be administered to a colony.

Cleaning your kit

For those of you that had a honey harvest and used your centrifuge and settling tanks, it's time to make sure they are clean and dry for storage until next year. I find that when washing any equipment that has come into contact with honey it is best to clean it initially with cold or tepid water to remove any wax particles. If you use hot water, it is likely to melt the wax which will then be smeared all over the inside of the spinner and or settling tank. Only after this has been done, do I use hot water with some soda to clean and remove any propolis followed by a final hot wash and then dry.

For drawn brood comb it's best to freeze it for about 48 hours before it is stored, to kill off any wax moth. If not, wax moth larvae will hatch over the winter and feed on the nutrient rich cocoons in the comb. It's best to burn any that still have dead bee larvae in. You don't want to reinfect a new colony with whatever caused the issue in the first place. Wax that is black

should be removed, disposed of and the frame cleaned.

The colony has been in the hive for at least five or six months and has had time to stick everything down with propolis or wax or both. This could be the ideal time to change all of the hive components for clean, well-repaired items.

Let's face it, the concept behind most of our hives is the movable frame; the clue's in the name. If everything is propolised solid, we might as well go back to using skeps.

Diseases & wax moths

Combs and boxes can also be sterilised to destroy the spores of chalkbrood, wax moth, and *Nosema spp.* disease of adult bees by using the evaporation fumes from acetic acid. There is no evidence that this treatment is effective against AFB or EFB.

Acetic acid is available from chemical suppliers and online. Begin treatment by stacking the brood and/or super boxes containing combs to be sterilised on solid surface such as a board or solid hive floor. Note that acetic acid is corrosive and attacks metal and concrete. Block off hive entrances, as acetic acid fumes are heavier than air and will travel from the top to the base of the stack, leaking out of any gaps or holes at the bottom.

Place a non-metallic dish (saucer or similar container) on the top of the frames of the top box. Very carefully, pour 80% acetic acid into the dish, allowing 120ml acetic acid/box—so 600 ml will treat five boxes.



Sad drones ejected from the hive in autumn

Seasonal tips for October (continued)

Then place an empty hive box on top of the stack. Close off the empty box on the top of the stack with a hive cover. Seal joints between the boxes with wide adhesive tape to stop fumes escaping. Leave the stack for about one week. When treatment is complete, the dishes of acid must be removed with caution and boxes should be thoroughly aired (at least two days) before they can be re-used. When using this system you must wear suitable protective clothing, protect your eyes and use rubber gloves. More details on the National Bee Unit website [here](#).

Winter preparation

Now is the time to take stock of the colonies you have and to assess whether they will make it through the winter.

One of the first checks concerns feeding: do they have enough food to see them through? The average approximate weight of stores should be about that of a full super. In reality and as a good rule of thumb, when you try to lift or 'heft' one side of the hive, it should feel like it is fixed to the floor. Remember to remove the queen excluder between the brood and super.

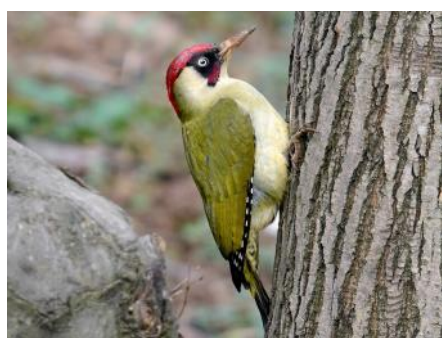
Now the weather is turning cooler, all drones should have been ejected. If there are still a significant number still in the hive, it could signal that the queen is failing in some way and should be replaced sooner than later. It's unlikely that you have spare mated queens at this time of year so think about uniting it with a nice strong colony. The same goes for any colony that is too small (bees covering four or fewer frames).

Keeping pests at bay

Next, look at the hive itself. Reduce the size of the entrance to help the bees defend against robbing wasps or other honeybees. Make sure it is bee and weather tight. Those small gaps between the boxes or around the roof that were not much of a problem in the summer can be a magnet for unwelcome guests.

With regard to the entrance block, some suggest the hole should be at the top under the brood box not down next to the mesh. This means a pile of dead bees will not block the entrance and stop the bees flying on sunny, still days.

Guard against other pests such as mice and Green Woodpeckers. Mice can wreak all sorts of havoc in a hive if left unchecked but can be dealt with by



Green woodpecker

fitting a mouse guard or reducing the size of the entrance. They may have very supple bodies but the one thing they can't manipulate is their skulls, so if you reduce the entrance to about 9mm in depth, it should keep the blighters out.

In some areas, Green Woodpeckers have learnt that beehives are a good source of food later in the year. Woodpeckers do as much damage inside the hive as mice, with the added bonus of a hole drilled through from



Chicken wire mesh: woodpecker deterrent

the outside. To protect the hive, place wire chicken mesh loosely round the outside of the hive to stop them being able to reach the hive and peck at the wood (see pic below). Or, wrap the sides of the hive in plastic to prevent them being able to perch on the hive. This also makes the hive more weather-proof.

Ventilation

Check there is good ventilation to stop the build up of condensation. We know it's the wet that gets our girls not the cold. Now that most hives are on open mesh floors there is plenty of air coming in at the bottom, so don't worry about the size of the entrance block.

You can cover the holes in the crown board with a flat piece of ply but space it off the board with a couple of matchsticks to maintain a through draught. Some argue that bees in the wild live in tree trunks that have no such through draught, and that we should aim to replicate that scenario. Your choice.

Whichever option you select, you should insulate the inside of the roof, remembering to keep the vents free.

And finally, make sure the hive stand is sturdy and the hive won't fall over in the next storm. And breathe.

Winter is coming

Now you're onto monthly maintenance visits, it's time to think about what's next. For you, there's winter meetings, honey shows both locally and nationally to attend; and of course how to improve your beekeeping.

Consider joining one of B&L's training courses.

For the bees, planning which queens to mate from, to breed that elusive 'gentle colony' and not those maniacs you've had to deal with all year. There is even a plus to the maniacs. They've helped in reducing my reaction to being stung so I don't look like John Merrick after each visit.

Roll on next season.

The Veiled Beekeeper—brought to you in association with [Loratidine](#).



*Manek Dubash
Asian Hornet
Team Co-ordinator*

Asian Hornet report



The Southampton nest. Photo: Alan Baxter

Breathe—for now: no Asian Hornet nests have been reported in our area in the last month. There was however a very large nest found and destroyed near Southampton (see above). Hastings is as close to us as the hornet has been discovered this year; a report in September of a lone hornet in Ardingly proved to be a false alarm.

Right now, and especially given the atrocious weather in the last few weeks, we might be forgiven for thinking that the season is over. Well, it pretty much is for us beekeepers but the yellow-legged hornet is right now making gynes—drones and mated queens. Those queens will be emerging to find places to hibernate for the winter, so they are doubly important to spot and kill. Kill? Yes, because they won't be returning to their nests so their usefulness for a track and trace operation is minimal.

However, if you're not 100% sure it's a queen, trap, photograph and use the Asian Hornet Watch app to report the finding.

So our primary role, to act as providers of relevant and accurate information to the public, remains as important as ever. I know many of us have been out and about putting up posters, giving talks to local groups, and other activities, all of it crucial. If you've not managed it so far, please consider doing so.

And do contact media outlets to correct them when they run photos of wasps and hoverflies above stories about Asian hornets.

Defra update

I recently attended an online talk by Defra's Nigel Semmence, in which he updated us on

the current state of affairs with respect to *Vespa velutina*.

The first bit of good news is that analysis of the nests, queens and lone hornets that have been DNA tested suggests there is no evidence of an established population in the UK. And the number of nests found in 2024 is down significantly on last year, due both to the weather, and to the amount of resources devoted to eradication.

Eradication is the policy driving the considerable amount of work involved in tracking, tracing and destroying every single nest. Were there an established population, the policy would eventually have to shift to containment, but we're not there—yet.

As an example of the nests found in 2024, Nigel cited an embryo nest in May found in a roadside café in Kent. He showed a picture: "with the queen you can see here returning with a meat parcel under her chin, so to speak, and she's returning to the nest to feed that to the young. Shortly after that she was caught in a Tupperware tub, frozen and sent to the lab for analysis".

Nests have commonly been found in brambles and undergrowth as well as up trees. Secondary nests are often found within 100 metres of the primary in sheds and even in barbecues.

Spring trapping has been successful, he said, which has clearly reduced the spread of this invader. Traps were deployed in 1km squares and of the queens found in spring, nine were from a nest in Four Oaks.

Identification by the public is key and there has been a lot of media interest—not all of it accurate even now—and, sadly, almost all the 23,000-plus reports from the public in 2024 have been of European hornets or hoverflies.

Nigel offered his thanks to beekeepers, AHATs and BKAs for their work in helping the public with identification, without which the nest destruction policy would not be possible, he said.

He concluded: "The key action we want you to be doing is raising awareness and recognition...please participate in your local Asian Hornet teams and through that you'll be requested if the sightings come up near you to do monitoring as requested by your AHAT co-ordinator. Please report sightings with a photograph on the Asian Hornet Watch app."

First winter meeting: how was your beekeeping season?



On 18 September we had our first Winter Meeting and an impressive 35 members attended the presentations at Eastgate Baptist Hall given by Rachel and myself. The first was the 'Big Reveal' of the Winter Programme and what is planned over the next 8 meetings.

Then we moved onto the main event, which was entitled 'How was your 2024 Beekeeping Season'.

As a committee we have done considerable work to re-energise the winter programme to grow attendance and create a social event which will keep the club together during the dark winter months. We have organised eight events through to April next year which, contrary to last month's newsletter, will all be live. *[Mea culpa: see my correction in the editorial, front page. MD]*.

Our aim is to make every meeting interesting, educational and good fun! So please come along, you will not be disappointed.

Your beekeeping season

So, how was your 2024 beekeeping season? Well, Rachel and I attempted to answer this question with a deep dive on the weather, a survey we ran as a club in August, data from Ian's swarm collections, an Asian Hornet update and commercial perspective from Tony Birkbeck.

From one of the dullest, rainiest and warmest winter and spring on record we charted the adversity our bees had to put up with at the start of the season. No wonder 37% of our hives perished, though we were able to give some

important perspective from COLOSS on the variability in this number. Fewer swarms also seemed to be a consequence to the awful start to the year, and a lack of honey and higher prices being charged was a commercial reaction to a drop in supply.

But it seems June, July and August were turnaround months with weather in line with previous norms and a real recovery in our bee populations.

The hard start to the year had reduced the Asian Hornet Armageddon we were worried about, and foraging seems to have been fully back on track. To use the football analogy it was a 'game of two halves' where the bees finally triumphed in the face of adversity earlier on in the year. Members are now reporting above-average honey crops and there is some evidence for reduced prices for honey at the moment due to oversupply *[Can't say I've noticed! MD]*.

Presentation and close

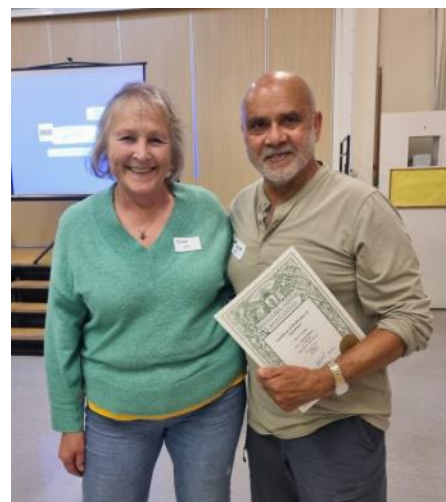
To close the meeting we were really pleased to present Jeff Rodrigues with his certificate from the BBKA on passing Module 5, Bee Biology, in March this year. Well done, Jeff!

We hope that this was an interesting presentation sharing our combined experiences and we fielded many questions on the data.

If you enjoyed it, please tell other members and please come along to the next talk on 16 October when Richard Rickett will be giving a talk on "From



Thank you to Ross, Mim and Jude for the sustenance.



Buckfast to Buckingham Palace". This talk comes with rave reviews after the SBKA conference and is being tailored for our area. *[I saw Richard give this talk at the Spring Convention, and it is fascinating. MD]*.

Feedback and thanks

We also promised at the meeting to take on board feedback for future presentations. We generated some very positive feedback on the name badges, particularly for welcoming new beekeepers, so we will continue this in future meetings.

Finally, I would like to thank Rachel for leading the Asian Hornet section of the presentation. I also want to thank Ian, Tony, Manek and Jude for helping with the presentation, to Norman for the technical set up and really importantly, Ross, Mim and Jude for a lot of hard work behind the scenes for keeping us all (very well) fed and watered on the evening!

But a massive part of the success of the evening was down to you, the members. 34 of you representing 22% of our membership responded to the survey and this led to the dataset which was the core of the evening.

So, thank you for making this evening possible.

*Words & photos by Nigel Kermode,
Meetings Secretary*

Out-apiary meetings

B&L runs four apiaries—a bigger estate than most BKAs—because we want them to be easy for all members across our area to access, and because we plan to make them more targeted, for example, for honey production or queen rearing. But most of all they're for you: whether new or experienced, we'd hope that, next year, you can come and join our apiary managers for a fun afternoon, messing about with bees and enjoying tea, cake and a chat in the sunshine.

Hove

We are preparing the apiary for winter, ensuring our bees are in the best possible condition to survive the colder months.

Since the third week of August, we have been treating the bees with Apiguard to combat varroa mites, and I'm pleased to say the treatment is now complete. Prior to starting the treatment, we carefully removed supers from the three hives to prevent contamination of the honey.

The hives are well-stocked with stores. Two hives have double brood boxes, both brimming with honey, while the third has a single brood box along with a super, also full of honey. Although reserves seem plentiful, we'll continue to monitor them throughout the winter to ensure they have enough stores to last until spring.



Summer days at Hove. Photo by Graham B.

Bumper harvest

In terms of honey production this season, Hove has been particularly fruitful. We've harvested a total of 73 pounds of honey from these hives. Some of this honey was taken to the South of England Honey Show by Jude

New, where it was offered for sale, and some of it has been sold locally as well.

While we are optimistic about the bees' chances of making it through the winter, the current unpredictable weather has us slightly concerned.

Even though they appear to have ample food stores, we'll remain vigilant and keep a close watch on their supplies. A sudden cold snap or prolonged period of bad weather could deplete their resources more quickly than anticipated, so we want to be ready to step in with supplementary feeding if necessary.

We're hopeful that with good care and a bit of luck, the bees will thrive through the winter and emerge strong and healthy in the spring.

Jose Reina, Apiary Manager

Rottingdean

Julie and I have been away on holiday since the last newsletter: first with our daughters and grandchildren in Portugal and then just the two of us on rail journey across Seville, Cordoba, Granada and Toledo. The intersection of Islamic, Judaic and Christian cultures produced amazing buildings and culture (until the Inquisition shattered everything).

Drone-laying workers

We tried not to worry too much about our six hives and two nucs. One split and a swarm capture were queenless, the latter for such a long time that you could easily see the consequences: laying workers and massive drone cells in irregular comb: a hopeless case now. I'm going to unite the other queenless colony tomorrow and hope its not too late. All the rest were doing okay.

The hopeless case will be shaken out 200 metres away. The flyers will return and beg entry to the flourishing swarm capture; the young will die. The comb will see drones culled and any honey (there is quite a lot) used as winter feed for the robust colonies.

Winter looms

So it looks like we may go into the winter with five or six colonies, as we'll unite a couple so that the winter cluster can be big enough to survive the low temperatures.

By the end of next month we will need to have put up our chicken-wire structures around each hive. Rottingdean Apiary is positioned in a little wood up on the Downs so Green Woodpecker pests will be a real risk. Hopefully that will be the last big job. It

has been a really busy, time-consuming first year as apiary manager!

We are thinking of planting a long row of heather just outside apiary, so if you have spare plants, get in touch!

Gustatory delights

I did so like the dark honeys of Portugal and Spain: such full flavours on the tongue.

I am exploring the making of chilli-hot honey, a craze that has just moved here from the US. I already make chilli jam so hot honey should be easier. I might use cappings honey as it seems a shame to use the premium stuff when I'm going to have to simmer the honey in order to get the infusion to work. Watch this space...that is if anyone actually reads my pieces!

Jeff Rodrigues, Apiary Manager

B&L wins at the South of England Agricultural Show

B&L scored triumphs at the SEAS last month: B&L stalwart Hilary Osman scored first for Products of the Hive, and Bob Curtis won two third places for Honey and a second prize for Photography. Below, you can see Bob demonstrating microscopy.



Beekeeping equipment for sale

B&L member Helena Lewis tells us that after 15 years of happy beekeeping, she has given up and now has a number of 14x12 hives (recently inspected on 10th August by Isaac Mullane, the bee inspector, plus a lot of beekeeping equipment.

For more information, contact her on:

- **M:** 07929 458680
- **E:** hflewis04@yahoo.co.uk
- **Phone:** 01903 814290

Here's a list of items for sale. No reasonable offer refused, can be picked up from Hassocks. For further information please contact Hilary Osman:

M: 07713 532285.

- Top Bar hive. Still in cardboard box, never used, just needs to be put together
- Metal hive parts. 20-in. x 11-in. / 508mm x 279mm x3 probably for nuc boxes
- Metal hive parts. 12-in. x 20-in./305mm x 508mm x1 pair of probably for gable roof, National hive

- Metal hive parts 12" x 22" x2 pairs probably for gable roof WBC hive
- Apishield wasp trap for National hive. Brand new
- Bee feeders for inside hive ? Ashforth 15 1/2" x 13" x3
- Dummy boards x2 for supers National hive
- National Crown boards x3
- Varroa boards for National hive x3
- Queen excluder 19½-in./495mm sq.
- Bag of brand new metal clips for frames
- Bag of Butler queen escapes
- Mouse guards for National hives x2
- Entrance blocks for National hives x3

Planning for 2025: a few thoughts

Is it too early to start thinking about 2025? I don't think so—obviously, or I wouldn't be writing this. Firstly, if next year's plans will need more kit, there's the timing of buying new stuff to take into account. The winter sales might be a good time to buy foundation for example. I have no insight into the timing, but I will be looking out for frames and foundation.

Splits, splits, splits

Why? Because next year, I shall be looking to make use of the four poly nucs I've accumulated—sadly there will be no more of these since Paynes is now closed—and so making splits to go into them. I currently have five hives—soon to be six as one of my mentees is temporarily halting her beekeeping activities, and she's loaning me her sole colony.

So the plan is to make at least two or three splits as early as possible to give them time to build up. Just have to wait for the first sightings of drones in the hive: without drones, there can be no mated queens...

As well as providing more colonies, it gives better resilience should one or more colonies fail to make it. This will be my 10th season of beekeeping and if

those years have taught me anything, it's that you will lose bees. Every year, something happens and one or more colony dies (often due to my lousy beekeeping skills), so it's as well to prepare for it.

Big boxes, dead bees and wasps

Following on from that thought, I lost two hives over the summer to wasp predation. This was largely my fault as I didn't react quickly enough to help the bees defend their colonies; even a reduced entrance block installed early on was not enough. I also should have known because last year that location also experienced a heavy wasp attack.

It may also be more than a coincidence that the two dead colonies were hived in 14x12 boxes, which I've concluded are too big for their current locations to support.

Not only did they not build up their numbers and so produce any more honey than the Nationals in the same apiary—which was one reason for using bigger boxes—they were also the colonies targeted by wasps. Since their populations didn't appear to me to be any bigger than the adjacent hives, I'm sticking solely to Nationals next year.

Queen rearing

Over the years, I've enjoyed attending queen rearing courses organised by our superb Training Co-ordinator Jude, but I've also watched our Barcombe Apiary Manager Tony using the Nicot system.

Queen rearing is not something I've tried before but I will in 2025. Splits should be more productive, it will mean that a queenless colony can quickly be re-energised, and I may be able to help out other B&L members too.

However, grafting is not for me: I was astonished at how small one or two-day-old larvae can be. With these old eyes, I could barely see them and, when I tried grafting, it was very much hit and miss—mostly miss. Counter-intuitively, they're so much smaller than the eggs from which they hatched but, with a little thought, that makes sense: the eggs include food for the growing larva before it hatches so they are naturally bigger than the beast that emerges.

So I've bought some Nicot queen rearing equipment to get those nucs going quickly. Some top-up research needs to be done over the winter!

That's my 2025: have you started your planning yet?

Manek Dubash



Winter meetings 2024-25

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Wednesday 16 Oct	Live	From Buckfast to Buckingham Palace, plus rare bees, by Richard Rickitt
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- All meetings are LIVE and start at 1915 for 1930, at Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Lewes BN7 2LR

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

Lewes Town Council



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- **Grassroots:** Jude New

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

- **Rottingdean:** Julie Lawrence & Jeff Rodrigues

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Sussex BKA County Representative: Vacant

National Honey Show Rep: Vacant

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.