

# Brighton & Lewes Beekers

A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2024

AGM & Honey Show  
15 February 2025, 7.30pm



### CONTENTS

#### [Seasonal hints & tips](#)..... 2

- Winter is here: here's what to do

#### [News from the Division](#)..... 4

- Asian Hornet report
- Equipment for sale
- Out-apiary report from Rottingdean
- Meeting report: Let's get ready for the

#### Honey Show

- Wax workshops support Bees for Development

#### [Meetings and contacts](#)..... 7

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

### EDITORIAL



#### Counting hives

The National Bee Unit keeps track of honey bee colonies around the country, for all sorts of good reasons. The 2024 hive count has just opened so it's a good idea to log in and [update your hive count](#).

#### Free exam papers

If you're considering taking one or more of the BBKA exams, past papers can be an invaluable resource. So the BBKA has now

made them available for free [here](#), to help with the revision process.

#### B&L library books

Our librarian Jose Reina has asked those who have outstanding books on loan to please return them. The library is a valuable shared resource for all of us, so, please, if you have a book you borrowed a while back (check!), please return it.

#### New software, same quality?

This newsletter was produced with Affinity Publisher—all previous editions used Microsoft Publisher which is being terminated. So if you notice anything different about this and future editions, that's why. Hopefully, you shouldn't...

*Manek Dubash, Editor*

## Winter meetings

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

All meetings are LIVE and start at 19.15 for 19.30 at Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Lewes BN7 2LR

Next Bee Chat: see social media

### EVENTS

- Meetings & more
- See this and back page for details

### NEXT MONTH

- Seasonal hints and tips
- Asian hornet update
- News news news!
- Latest events
- Meetings & more

### SHARE YOUR PHOTOS & 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 group](#)



QR link to B&L website

## Seasonal tips for December

### Visit your hives

December is a very quiet month in the apiary, but you still need visit your bees on a regular basis, especially if they are not at the bottom of your garden. The checks are not very intrusive, so some can be done when the weather is not at its best.

Such as: are they still upright after a storm or investigation by a passing badger? If you use mouse guards, check to make sure they are not blocked by dead bees. Do they have enough feed? Does the hive feel lighter than the last time you hefted it? Not sure? Put fondant on anyway.

When putting fondant on make sure it's placed directly on the top of the frames over the main brood cluster, and not above the crown board. We all know that as the temperature drops, the bees cluster more tightly and will not—cannot—move very far to find more stores. To stop the fondant oozing down between the bars, I put a plastic queen excluder between the bars and the fondant.

I have assumed that you will be able to get baker's fondant but you can make your own. Here's a recipe I used when I first started: *Beekeeping for Beginners* by Andrew Richards. Northern Bee Books 1991. ISBN 0-907908-61-6. It's an old book, I didn't start beekeeping then.

### Fondant recipe: ingredients

White granulated sugar	1.36kg / 3lb
Boiling water	284ml / ½ pint
Salt	Pinch (optional)
Cream of Tartar	Pinch (optional)

Why the optional ingredients? Bees prefer slightly salty water; and the sugar is inverted when boiled with cream of tartar.



Hive blown over: just what you don't want.  
Photo: Bob Curtis

### Fondant recipe: method

- Add sugar to pan. Add the boiling water, heat and stir. The mixture will be thick, so stir until the mixture thins. Do not allow the sugar to burn as this will produce a toxic candy.
- Add the salt and cream of tartar and allow to simmer for 20 minutes.
- Grease/oil/clingfilm the containers you are going to cast the candy in.
- After simmering for 20 minutes, let it cool but continue stirring. When it thickens, pour into oiled containers.
- Note: when pouring, it will start to set quicker as the volume reduces.
- When set, the candy should be soft enough to mark with your nail but hard enough to tip out of the container and handle.

There are many recipes out there. If all else fails, dip a bag of sugar in water, wait until it sets and use that.

### Varroa treatment

December is a good time to think about an oxalic acid (OA) treatment to knock back any varroa mites still active. Either by make up a sugar solution containing the requisite amount of OA and dribble it over the seams of bees in each brood box if they are on a brood-and-a-half or double brood. Or you could use sublimation to apply the OA, using kit such as the GasVap.

Vaporisation and sublimation in this context mean the same thing and is the method where the OA crystals are inserted inside the hive and heated to produce a vapour. This vapour can be created by using an electrically heated wand or vaporiser filled with crystals and heated using your blowtorch.

The best result from both methods is achieved when the colony is broodless. How do you know when they're broodless? Unless you inspect on a regular basis you'll never know.

In the trials carried out at Sussex University a few years ago, they overcame this problem by uncapping any sealed brood before they applied the OA treatment. You may not want to go to all that trouble and accept that you may have missed a few mites. But

make sure the open mesh floor (OMF) is sealed with the varroa board to maximise the effects.

If you dribble it, only make up the solution as and when you need it.

Just a few cautionary words: OA is toxic to us, so avoid breathing in the vapour by using a fitted half-mask with a filter suitable for organic gases and vapours. Do not use substances from wholesaler/s, only use Veterinary Medicines Directorate (VDM) approved medicines such as Api-Bioxal.

### Record-keeping

If you keep records (and you should), spend some time going over this year's activities; that's what they are for. They will help you to decide on whether to manage your hives differently next year. You may want to increase the number of colonies; or rear more queens; or select the best honey producers. As ever the possibilities are endless so take some time to think about it.

And lastly, whatever you decide next year make sure you have all the kit required and start building it now. Have a very merry Christmas and a successful New Year!

*The Veiled Beekeeper*



GasVap kit from Bridge Cottage Bees



Manek Dubash  
Asian Hornet Team  
Co-ordinator

## Asian Hornet report

We're in luck: the weather seems to be defeating the yellow-legged Asian hornet *Vespa velutina*—so far. That though is just in our local area: this year, nests have been found this side of Hastings, which is not far away, so we shouldn't be complacent.

Those of us who have had hives defeated by mass wasp attacks this year might of course raise an eyebrow at the assertion that the wasp season is over, as Asian hornets are, like their native European cousins *Vespa crabro*, just big wasps. They share a lifestyle, many behaviours and instincts, and a body pattern.

In that regard, although the AH queens are likely by now to be tucked up in hibernating holes—in other words, in your

sheds and garages—the number of wasp nests discovered this year has been described by pest controllers as huge. So it's been a good year for them.

Let's see if we can't make next year a bad one for *V. velutina*. Their nests are now visible as recent storms have blown the leaves off the trees. The BBKA is launching a campaign encouraging people to look up at the treetops to spot those hulking great nests which the hornets tend to park up there. More of this when I receive more details.

If you spot one, you know what to do: use the Asian Hornet Watch app to report it.

And I hope you have a happy, hornet-free Christmas!

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## South of England Honey Show report

*The SoEHS organisers have sent us this report of last September's event*

The South of England Honey Show is staged by volunteer members of a Bees & Honey sub-committee of the SoE Agricultural Society, at the SoE Showground, in Ardingly, West Sussex.

For 2024, the show returned to its new home within the showground's Norfolk Pavilion, as part of this year's Autumn Show & Horse Trials event on Sat 21 and Sun 22 September.

The event provides an opportunity for beekeepers throughout the south-east to participate in a friendly Show Bench competition, and to also display and demonstrate to the visiting public the diversity and quality of locally produced products of the hive.

### Stalls included

- The Blue Ribbon qualifying Honey Show bench display, scrutinised by a

National Honey Show judge.

- Information displays about Honey Bees & Beekeeping
- Practical demonstrations of microscopy
- Interaction with public about the threat posed by the yellow-legged Asian Hornet, highlighted by a report that same weekend of a verified sighting near Ardingly.
- Trade stalls selling wax products and honey marmalade.

### Bees & Honey stall

- Selling jarred and comb honey, on behalf of participating and exhibiting beekeepers from between London and the coast.
- Tasting of 20 different variants in colour, texture and flavour of the

honey offered for sale before that inevitable purchase!

### How we did it

Once the setting up was largely able to be completed during the preceding Friday, the organising team then worked during the two days of the show with additional volunteers.

Together we provided the stewarding needed to supervise all the content and convey our passion for beekeeping to the visiting public.

Would you like to participate and maybe even help at next year's show?

If so, please contact us at [chief.steward@deodar.org.uk](mailto:chief.steward@deodar.org.uk) or [beesandhoneyinfo@gmail.com](mailto:beesandhoneyinfo@gmail.com)





## Apiary reports

### Rottingdean



The leaves are dropping fast in the wood, but the dense branches seem to be providing some respite from the wind and the rain—I am hopeful that the bees will get some protection from the often harsh conditions on the ridge.

It is also good to see that there are no Asian hornet nests at height.

The bees were all bringing in ivy pollen until a fortnight ago, and all are taking down fondant voraciously.

We're going into the winter with five colonies, four in cedar hives and one in one of Paynes' poly hives. All have good numbers with which to build their cluster when the temperature drops (like today, -3°C overnight). The cedar boxes have a layer of insulation below the roof, propped up on one side with a twig to facilitate the airflow.

This year I have taken off all supers, so, the bees are in brood boxes only.

I think green woodpeckers could be a risk in the wood, so I have started protecting them with chicken wire, using bamboo poles to suspend the structure from the roof—see photo above. I guess that both small mammals could be a risk too so I'll need to think of some remedial measures.

#### **Shed problem**

Some readers will know that a Saltdean resident's complaint against

the High Barn Community Farm's polytunnel ("its on National Park land", though the farm is too) has been put to B&H Council's planning authorities.

The situation has meant that we have no shed to store our considerable amounts of equipment which spent some time under the nursery tables in one of the polytunnels and then in a container kindly shared with Ben who runs the market gardening business. But the field mice—who seem to have no difficulty gaining access to the container—have reduced some frames to wood shreds in order to build their nests, plus the frame kits are peed all over by the mice which the bees will not like...so we have to clean everything before assembling frames for the new.

So, for the present season, I would like a new shed, please Santa.

Happy Christmas B&L beekeepers!

*Jeff Rodrigues, Apiary Manager*

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## Equipment for sale: please use contact details below

I started this hobby with my daughter when she was five as she wanted to keep bees as pets! We had great times doing this. She is now 12 and has school work to concentrate on but still loves bees.

However I cannot continue keeping bees any longer as my business is growing and I don't have the time along with a full time job too.

So I am selling two hives with one active colony inside one of the hives, two five-gallon tubs of feed, and all related equipment. The hives were hand-made by a furniture maker locally in Hassocks.

The two hives are situated in Hassocks with 24-hour access. There will be no need to move them (unless you want to) as the site owners are

happy that they are there, and visitors love them and buy the honey too.

If you buy the hives and wish to continue at the site, I will introduce you to the owners as the bees are established there with a good relationship with owners, and an outlet for selling the goods too.

I am asking £350 for all but open to offers.

Contact Stuart on 07515 929031

I have a number of hives with bees and some other pieces of equipment that I am very happy to pass on to any one who is taking up the hobby.

After 15 years or so and now retired I am finding it too much like hard work.

- 6 hives with bees
- 3 swarm boxes
- 3 poly nucs & 3 poly hives
- 13 wooden supers
- 14 poly supers
- Many super frames with foundation
- Honey buckets

Both of the property owners where the hives are currently kept are keen to carry on having the hives in their gardens.

Contact Richard on  
[richard11foster@gmail.com](mailto:richard11foster@gmail.com)

## Meeting report: let's get ready for the Honey Show



Our four expert judges providing tips and advice to our members

Just as Strictly Come Dancing is entering its climax for the 2024 season, we at Brighton and Lewes brought together our four expert judges for our major competition of the year—yes, our own annual Honey Show.

We may not be competing for a tacky glitter ball, but we will be competing for many category prizes, together with the glory, pride and honour that goes along with each of them!

When we were setting up the winter programme we received a lot of feedback, particularly from new members, that it was unclear how the judging of entries to the Honey Show was done.

With our Honey Show scheduled for Wednesday 19 February 2025 (mark your calendars please!) we decided to devote our third winter meeting to explain how all the categories would be judged. And to make this event real, we invited the actual judges to come along and explain their role to the audience. So on 20th November we all

gathered at Lewes's Eastgate Church Baptist Hall, to hear tips and secrets in our quest to win that elusive first prize.

### Honey

First on our agenda was Gerald Legg, with his deep knowledge and appreciation of all things related to honey. As Gerald was keen to point out, the bees work very diligently to provide us with their honey, so when it comes to a show, we need to put in a little extra effort to showcase the excellence of their hard labours. Gerald took us through the filtration of the honey and the 'careful, thorough and methodical' transfer into a quality jar and lid to create a worthy show winner.

### Wax and candles

Next on the agenda was Heidi Burgess to whom we owe huge gratitude. As a very last-minute stand in for Jude and Sarah, Heidi spoke with knowledge and passion on the subject of preparing wax and candles for a show. Thank you, Jude and Sarah, for all the pre-work and to Heidi for stepping in at the last moment, redrafting the presentation and presenting it to us on the evening. I should have realised that quality wax starts with the raw material and that taking wax from new comb will give you the best results.

### Cakes and biscuits

Our next expert was Norman Dickinson who enthralled us with his cake and biscuit knowledge! From



Norman shares how to get the perfect 'snap' on breaking a biscuit

how to create the correct honey/sugar balance for optimum taste, to creating the perfect 'snap' on a biscuit, Norman's talk was full of insights and tips, particularly in the area of creating identical biscuits (which is something a judge always looks for). Every session prompted lots of questions, but Heidi raised valid questions on cake size and whether the cake could contain fruit. Great feedback and we will address these in the rules next year.

### Photography

Finally, our expert photographer, Bob Curtis, took us on a tour of how to create a perfect picture. From portrait and landscape photography we focused [I'm sorry. NK] on macro photography and the problems of depth of field. Then Bob shared some previous photographs from B&L competitions and used these to highlight the pros and cons of each. Afterwards he shared a selection of his own winners which encapsulated some of the points made earlier.



Gerald explains the importance of being careful, thorough and methodical



Heidi in full flow explaining how good comb equates to the best quality wax



Bob shares the importance of the 'rule of thirds' in photography

## Meeting report: let's get ready for the Honey Show (cont.)

There were too many tips, nuances and secrets shared to summarise in this article. But certainly, all those attending can now go away with a greater understanding of what constitutes a show winner. And hopefully, this event will improve both the quantity and quality of our forthcoming Honey Show! As Bob said at the start, it is all meant to be fun and there is nothing to lose by entering, and so much to gain.

### Acknowledgements

Our third winter meeting was a DIY event and would not have been

possible without all the time and effort put in by Gerald, Heidi, Norman and Bob. And while Jude and Sarah could not make the event in person, they contributed so much preparing material for the presentations.

It is also important to mention the 'background' team that make these events possible, so thanks to Norman for the equipment set up, to Ross for manning the kitchen and to Mim and Peter for providing the cakes. Thank you all.

### Next meeting

Our next meeting is an external

presentation: 'Must-haves versus Nice-to-haves'—Perspectives from a Commercial Beekeeper. In this meeting, commercial beekeepers Ken and Dan Basterfield will discuss what it takes to run a commercial operation and how this differs to the 'hobbyist' approach. It promises to be a brilliant talk.

As it's close to Christmas, mince pies, cakes and glühwein will be on offer—and please feel free to come dressed in the festive spirit (gaudy Christmas jumpers are encouraged).

*Nigel Kermode, Meetings Secretary*

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## Wax workshops support Bees for Development



Bees create economic incentive for people to care for them and for their food sources – which means that with every new beekeeper trained an environmental champion is created. If conditions are good for bees, they are good for everything.

Monmouth-based, Bees for Development is a global charity which started in 1993 with the aim of promoting beekeeping to change people's lives for the better while supporting ecosystem integrity.

It promotes sustainable beekeeping to combat poverty, build resilient livelihoods and benefit biodiversity. BfD is particularly proud to be working closely with partners in Ethiopia, Ghana and Uganda.

### BfD and our workshops

The charity's methods are based upon the interdependent and sustaining relationship between bees, flowering

plants and people through the craft of beekeeping. I understand that 90% of donations are used directly to support beekeepers in the developing world. Patrons include Monty Don, Tom Seeley and Sting.

Guests at our wax workshops were invited to donate to the charity when they bought refreshments—this worked well.

### Why honey bees?

Honey bees enable people to make a living through working with nature, harvesting honey and beeswax, while helping to preserve biodiversity. Beekeeping is low cost, sustainable, and has the greatest effect on those who have the very least.

BfD shares beekeeping skills with people in the poorest communities of the world, giving a reliable, sustainable income for life, using local skills, materials and bees.

Bees for Development's activities encompass environmental work, trade, research and technical aspects of apiculture, feasibility studies, training and extension work, market analysis, as well as project design, planning, implementation, management, and evaluation.

BfD's work has brought it into

contact with countless stakeholders, projects and businesses, with working experience in more than 50 nations.

### Donations and cakes

Members donated cakes, raising a total of £200 between the two sessions. At the workshops we were able to demonstrate 12 different recipes which used beeswax and or honey.

At any workshop we had enough volunteers to demonstrate up to eight recipes. Non-beekeepers had an opportunity to meet us and start thinking about buying local honey, supporting B&L and joining us to find out more about our craft. We were asked lots of questions, heard many compliments about our knowledge and saw lots of smiling faces.

We have been asked when the next wax workshop will be held. Santa's helpers have gone to the North Pole to help with the Christmas rush so the next event will be in 2025 at the earliest.

Many thanks to everyone who came and helped or played with beeswax and honey helping to raise funds for the work of Bees for Development.

*Jude New, Training Co-ordinator*



### Winter meetings 2024-25

Date	Topic
Wed 18 Sep	How was your beekeeping season? Short talks plus Q&A
Wed 18 Oct	From Buckfast to Buckingham Palace, by Richard Rickitt
Wed 20 Nov	Let's get ready for the Honey Show: judging standards by Jude, Gerald and Bob
Wed 18 Dec	Must-haves vs nice-to-haves: a commercial beekeeper's perspectives, by Dan & Ken Basterfield
Wed 15 Jan	How to keep your bees in the best of health, by Margaret Murdin
Wed 19 Feb	<b>2025 AGM &amp; Honey Show</b>
Wed 19 Mar	The role of drones and drone congregation areas, by Stephen Fleming
Wed 16 Apr	The special language of bees, by Margaret Murdin

All meetings are LIVE and start at 19.15 for 19.30 at  
Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Lewes BN7 2LR

Next Bee Chat: see social media

### Newsletter deadlines

Please send all contributions, **including photos**, to the  
Editor (contact details on right). Max length 500 words.

Copy deadline: 18th of the month before publication date,  
except 11 December. Email photos for the website to  
Gerald Legg (details on right).

### National Bee Unit Inspectors

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We are grateful to the following for their support:



Lewes Town Council

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- **Barcombe:** Tony Birkbeck

- **Grassroots:** Jude New

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

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

#### B&L Facebook Group

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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.