

Brighton & Lewes Beekers

A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2025

AGM & Honey Show
19 February 2025, 7.30pm



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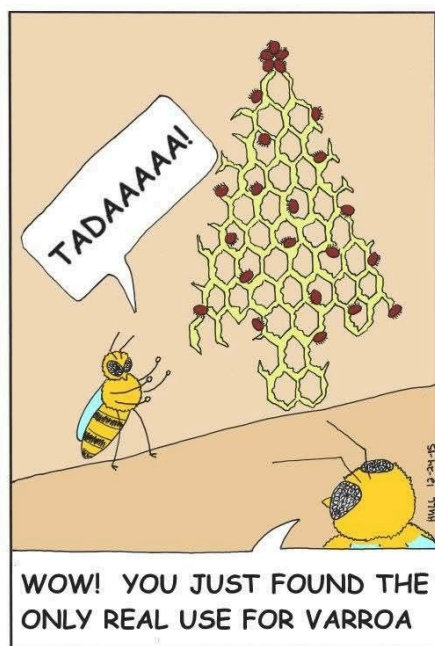
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EDITORIAL



With the depth of winter now ahead, it's time to plan your beekeeping year. My plans this year are much the same as last—especially since things didn't go completely to plan, but that's how it goes when you're dealing with livestock.

Enough of that: we've the AGM and Honey Show coming up next month and given the amount of information generated by Nigel at the penultimate meeting of 2024, I hope you feel inspired to enter the competition. But before that, Margaret Murdin will be talking to us about healthy bees.

Finally, please check out the Christmas dinner photos and quiz on pages 6 & 7.

And finally finally (sic), I wish you very happy and prosperous new year.

Manek Dubash, Editor

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.

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

ONLINE

 [B&L website](#)
 [Facebook group](#)



QR link to B&L 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 results in the death of the colony.

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



Using a GasVap reduces the varroa load.

good sign, as it shows that 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. Use strapping or concrete blocks if they're in an exposed location.

If I don't see the odd bee flying on an apiary visit, I tend to tap the hive and put my ear against the side 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

1. Heft hives and feed if required
2. Carry out oxalic acid treatment
3. Make a plan for next season: expansion; queen rearing; honey production...
4. Order any tools and equipment you will need to carry out the plan
5. Clean and repair spare boxes, frames, floors, roofs, and crown boards.
6. Make up frames ready to insert foundation later in the spring
7. Clear new and existing apiary sites
8. Make new hive stands
9. Make sure sites are secure against both people and livestock
10. Look forward to a better season!

The Veiled Beekeeper



Manek Dubash
Asian Hornet Team
Co-ordinator

Asian Hornet report



Bit of a row going on: a new study from the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology “has shown that although the UK has suitable climate and habitat for the yellow-legged hornet, also known as the Asian hornet, effective action has prevented this voracious predator of pollinators from establishing here.”

In other words, a combination of reports from the public and beekeepers, along with action and co-ordination from the National Bee Unit have stemmed the spread of the

yellow-legged hornet. Not stopped it entirely, nor eradicated it. However, some media reports have suggested that as a consequence the Asian hornet scare is over.

We know this is not even slightly true: they’re still here. So if anyone suggests that this may be the case—and I’m sure your dinner table conversations consist of little else—please disabuse them of this notion.

We will have our work cut out in 2025. If the prevalence of wasps in 2024 is anything to go by, we may find ourselves struggling to contain the invasion.

Meanwhile, please let me wish you a happy new year and may your apiary remain a hornet-free zone.

Apiary reports

Barcombe

Barcombe is on its knees

I’m shocked by how bad the wasps have been this year.

This year I’ve been managing five apiaries, three in different locations in Maresfield, one in Hadlow Down and then Barcombe, and have spent most of this year building up good healthy bees via the queen rearing programme and a number of successful splits. Despite the lack of any spring honey I had been thinking it had been a good year.

When I took the honey off during the last week of July, Barcombe had five colonies. They had very little varroa and because I took the honey slightly earlier than normal they continued to build up a good amount

of their own stores. This was great as I didn’t need to feed, so winter preparations were all looking good.

Obliterated by wasps

But, then the wasps arrived at two of my Maresfield apiaries and more so at Barcombe. They were relentless!

Traps were put out and were getting filled daily. The DIY wasp blocks that I demonstrated at last year’s AGM were definitely slowing down the invasion but in the face of the onslaught, it wasn’t long before the first colony absconded. Every visit, all I saw was a constant attack on specific hives—deep into November.

Unfortunately Barcombe has now lost four colonies because of them and I’m suffering the same fatalities at two of my Maresfield sites. Unbelievably the only current survivor at Barcombe is the notorious hive five; there’s something about that colony which has proved their worth as they’re only bees that win a fight against wasps.

To make matters worse the mice are also back (see photo, left). I think the increase might have something to do with the chickens at the farm. They have damaged some of the equipment in the shed which I’m hoping to sort

out sometime between Christmas and the new year.

Hopefully the wasps have now disappeared, although they were still flying within the apiary in mid December. I’m aware of other Beekeepers who have had a similar experience this year too, however my Hadlow Down site has been untouched, I haven’t seen a single wasp there.

Tony Birkbeck, Apiary Manager



A nuc at Barcombe wiped out by wasps



Apiary reports

Rottingdean



At last decently cold temperatures! All five colonies are clustered. I checked that fondant is directly above the cluster in each hive and closed up quickly. Checked the site for Asian hornet nests—easy now that the leaves have tumbled—negative result.

I'll have to re-do one of the anti-

woodpecker chicken wire frames because the one edge is pushing up against the roof lid and could cause a leakage of heat..

Someone offered me two colonies in Burgess Hill but when I got there the hives were empty. I was disappointed but I took away a Paynes poly national hive and had a good conversation!

The three polytunnels used hitherto for the horticultural business have been dismantled as a result of the Brighton & Hove Council decision on the lone complainant from Saltdean.

The farmer asked contractors to do the demolition—the result is a mess, with debris and plastic sheeting drifting around the site, including the Apiary.

It is now replacing the lovely neat and well tended tunnels that Ben managed. It looks desolate. At least the container will remain and we can use that for storing our equipment. Though we will have to make it field mouse-proof.

I've been experimenting with using

cappings honey to make 'hot honey' (chilli infused honey, so sweet and chilli hot with the suggestion of tartness) which is selling hot in London, particularly among young people. It is being used as a drizzle for anything roasted, pizza, burgers, pigs-in-blankets and so on. But in Rottingdean (not so many young things) it is still a bit of a novelty and our bakery is not shifting as much as conventional honey.

I am waiting for a windless day so that I can administer vaporised oxalic acid—because after I have done that I can mostly leave the hives alone until the spring with the minimum of beekeeper interference.

Julie came back from the recent talk in Lewes about proselytising about double brood boxes—I'll add it to the winter reading/research list. *[Looks like it's worthwhile for the commercial beekeeper. MD]*

Jeff Rodrigues, Apiary Manager

Equipment for sale: please use contact details below

After 17 years of mostly very enjoyable bee keeping, I have had to give up for mobility issues so am giving away my equipment.

For some of the more expensive bits, I'm asking for a charity donation to Parkinsons UK. Abbreviated list below (no bees).

1. 2x 14x12 cedar hives and all bits
2. 1x 14x12 nucleus
3. 8x wooden supers
4. Manual honey extractor (in gc)
5. Cold uncapping tray (Thorne's)
6. Extras: knives, forks, filters etc.
7. Large warming cabinet (Thorne's)
8. Some 50 honey jars, unused, boxed

9. All in one suit, almost unused
10. Straw skep

Contact [Rod Thomas](#): 07710 967754
rodandlizth@btinternet.com



Meeting report: a commercial beekeeper's perspective

Have you ever wondered how a commercial operation compares to us hobbyists? This is when we found out.

It was a dark, cold and wet winter evening when a joyous group of Brighton and Lewes Beekeepers descended upon the Eastgate Baptist Hall for an evening of education and merriment... And then an angel appeared unto them- and they were not to be disappointed.

Sometimes at Christmas the best presents are those which you were not expecting and our guest speaker, Dan Basterfield, excelled with his beekeeping insights, lessons from a commercial beekeeper of many years.

The committee elves had been tirelessly working this year to find someone who could explain the ins and outs of commercial beekeeping, but Santa Dan both excelled and even shocked his audience on how to manage 120 beehives efficiently.

A Christmas Tree bloke started the meeting with a compulsory elf and safety briefing. *[Is there much more of this?? Ed.]*

After this Santa Dan, who runs his own grotto in Devon called Blackbury Honey Farm explained the challenges associated with managing a business with up to 10 apiaries within a 15-mile radius with 12-16 hives at each apiary.

A multi-location organisation needs to keep things simple, so Dan emphasised the need for standardisation. Using only Commercial brood boxes and supers, standardising everything else, he minimises equipment types.

His second and third general messages were quality equipment and

a rejection of so-called 'systems'. In practice this means buying the best hives and frames (never second quality), top quality robust extractors and avoiding novelty gadgets. And systems which claim to offer the best results but actually create complexity include Snelgrove, Cloake boards, Demaree and brood-and-a-half all came in for criticism—along with any system named after its inventor.

Among his own on-site techniques was, for example, the walk-away split: splitting a strong hive without knowing the queen's location, because the bees will sort themselves out.

Forget weekly inspections

Perhaps the more surprising lesson involved inspections: hives are only fully inspected twice a year, just to check for disease, as there simply isn't time to inspect all hives frame-by-frame. The rest of the year, he uses the 'tilt and smoke' technique, examining the underside of the top brood box to check for queen cells.

This, together with his judgement on colony size, enables decisions on splits and whether to add another brood box. And he always uses a double brood box with no queen excluder, never brood and a half, to enable frames to be moved around freely—it's good enough to avoid swarming nine times out of 10.

Other issues he covered include creating a good apiary site, his queen rearing approach and the need to have many spare queens, his own 'Universal Beekeeping Plan', the technique for caging queens as he checks hives, his five-minute queenless test, the hospital apiary, use of pollen substitutes and quick varroa treatments.

These work methods had been honed over at least two generations of Basterfields. It is a testimony to the interest this provoked with all the questions after the talk and the 'chatter' on B&L Buzz afterwards.

Aftermath

But this was only the main course to a fantastic Christmas occasion. After very many questions, the mince pies, cake, mulled wine and teas were served for the merry group.

To put on such an event took a lot of effort and so thank you to the many elves who laid out (and put away) the furniture, and thanks to four special elves who manned the door and sign in (Rowena Elf), who slaved over homemade mince pies and ginger cake (Mim Elf), who served all the food and drink (Ross Elf) and who bought a tonne of equipment on his sleigh to make the presentation run seamlessly (Santa Norman).

So, merry Christmas and all best wishes for 2025! Next meeting will be awesome: Margaret Murdin wrote the book on bee health and will talk to us on 15 January at 1930 at Eastgate Baptist Hall—don't miss it!

Nigel Kermode (aka the Christmas Tree), Meetings Secretary



B&L Christmas dinner: the photos



After a highly satisfying dinner and refreshments at Browns in Brighton on 9 December, quizmaster Jeff Rodrigues had everyone puzzling over his bee-related questions: see photo above, right, left and below. Huge thanks are due to Jude for organising the event.



Large photo above: the quiz-winning table are looking pleased with themselves, especially after Jeff presented each of them with a bottle of Cremont. To try the quiz for yourself, see next page. All photos by Graham Bubloz (for which many thanks).

B&L Christmas dinner: the quiz

At the Christmas dinner on 9 December, Jeff Rodrigues presented the diners with a tricky quiz. Here's the quiz: how many did you get (no looking!)? Answers below.

1. What is the matchstick test used for?
2. From what plant is a dull orangey-yellow pollen foraged?
3. Nurse bees reluctant to accept nectar loads, queen is not being fed, foragers begin scouting. What is happening?
4. Sac brood is a fungal infection. True or false?
5. Through which air entrance does the acarine mite enter the bee?
6. A swarm cluster is usually: (a) three bees thick (b) five bees thick (c) six bees thick?
7. What enzyme do bees add to nectar to break it down to simpler carbohydrates?
8. *Apis cerana*—the Asian honey bee—co-evolved alongside the Asian Hornet. Name one of its defence methods against predation by *Vespa velutina*?
9. Bees have about ten types of dance within the hive: what instruction does the jostling dance indicate?
10. What is an imperfect supersedure?
11. A virgin queen following a mating flight has mated with about 15-20 drones. Immediately after the last mating, approximately how many million sperms are contained in her abdomen?
12. When the mated queen re-enters the hive following her mating flight, how many million sperms remain in her abdomen?
13. What does Picture 1 indicate?
14. Where does the drone's keep his endophallus when he is not about to mate?
15. How many moults are there before a bee emerges from the cell?
16. What function do the Malphigian tubules serve?
17. What is a sensilla?
18. How many lenses does an ocelli have?
19. Foragers collect nectar, pollen and water and what other substance?
20. At what temperature is the core of a broodless winter cluster?
21. What's the name of the behaviour shown in Picture 2?

22. Name the device for finding out the moisture content of nectar/honey?
23. What is a nectary guide?
24. What is shown in Picture 3?
25. In what year did the National Honey Show start?

PICTURE CLUES



Above: Picture 1. Below left: Picture 2. Below right: Picture 3



17. Sensing organ (in/on cuticle of exoskeleton)
18. One
19. (Resin to make) propolis
20. 18°C
21. Bearding
22. Refractometer
23. Markings or patterns on flower petal leading to nectar
24. Swarm collector
25. 1923
13. Hmm...there is a difference of opinion! Either worker laying or drone-laying queen. After a bit of research, I still cannot find a definitive answer. The pic is from one of my apparently queenless colonies.
14. Inside his abdomen
15. Six
16. Remove (nitrogenous) waste

1. FB/EFB
2. Ivy
3. Preparation for swarming
4. False
5. First (thoracic) spiracle
6. (a)
7. Invertase
8. Heat-balling
9. Go to the dance
10. Queen has died

Answers

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
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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

Seasonal Bee Inspectors

Daniel Morgan

E: daniel.morgan@apha.gov.uk

M: 07500 954390

Helen Hadley

E: helen.hadley@apha.gov.uk

M: 07871 320 316

We are grateful to the following for their support:



Lewes Town Council

Co-operative Membership Community Fund

Contacts

President: Vacant

Chairman: Vacant

Hon Secretary: Mat Budgen

e: matbudgen@hotmail.com

m: 07776 468513

Treasurer/Membership Secretary:

Norman Dickinson

34 Abergavenny Road, Lewes BN7 1SN

e: memsec.blbees@outlook.com

m: 07792 296422

Meetings Secretary: Nigel Kermode

e: nigelkermode@hotmail.co.uk

m: 07752 825369

Librarians: Felicity Alder & Jose Reina

e: jmreinareina@gmail.com

m: 07544 079105

Swarm Co-ordinator: Ian White

e: swarms@brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk

m: 07999 987097

Training Co-ordinator: Jude New

e: newapiary@hotmail.com

Newsletter Editor: Manek Dubash

e: editor@mailforce.net

m: 07788 923557

Asian Hornet Team Co-ordinator: Manek Dubash

e: blbka.ahat@gmail.com

m: 07762 312592

Webmaster: Gerald Legg

e: gerald@chelifier.com

Apiary Managers

- **Barcombe:** Tony Birkbeck

- **Grassroots:** Jude New

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

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

B&L Facebook Group

Group Administrator: Graham Bubloz

E: graham.bubloz@gmail.com

M: 07758 866278

Sussex BKA County Representative: Vacant

National Honey Show Rep: Vacant

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