

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



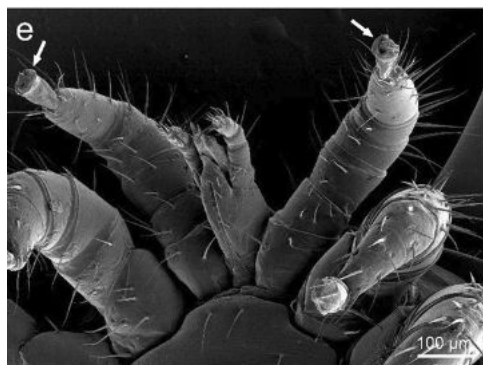
A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER JULY 2025

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EDITORIAL



Do you still plan to treat for varroa (close-up, above)? Yes, so do I. But I wish I didn't have to because of the upset it causes to the bees, the expense and the hassle factor.

If only the bees could take care of this parasite themselves. Well, there is a way

to go treatment-free for those of us with bees without hygienic behaviour. It's a movement that's been gathering momentum in recent years, judging by the number of presentations and talks I've seen.

So, as well as the excellent contributions from our apiary managers and others in this issue, there's a great summary on [page 7](#) of a practical path towards treatment-free beekeeping, penned by Peter Coxon, chairman of Sussex BKA. Put it in your to-do list...!

We also have a feature ([page 9](#)) from Rottingdean apiary manager Jeff Rodrigues of how bees starve over winter. Food for thought.

Manek Dubash, Editor

July 2025 events

Date	Event	Location	Leader(s)
Saturday 12 July	Basic assessment	Grassroots apiary	Jude & Assessors
Saturday 12 July	First aid	Westdene Barn	Joy & paramedic
Saturday 19 July	Honey bee health	Bee Safari, Hove	Adrien, Jessica, Ian, Joy
Wednesday 23 July	First aid	Ringmer Village Hall	Jude & paramedic
Saturday 26 July	The repair shop	Westdene Barn	Ross, Jessica, Jude

Bee Chats

Wednesday 9 July, The Hope Inn, Newhaven
Wednesday 6 August, The Cock Inn, Ringmer

You can find the full list of 2025 events and meetings [on the back page](#).

EVENTS

- Harvesting
- Extracting
- First aid for beekeepers
- Repair shop

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

Notes from the Chair



Manek Dubash
Chairman

You don't need me to tell you that it's harvest time. Whether you've already taken off a spring crop, as I have, or you're waiting until August, the bees are working hard for us right now.

And I hope they're working hard in our apiaries too. While it's a shame that for all sorts of reasons only two of our four apiaries are currently fully operational, I'm hoping that soon we will be able to take a crop and sell it at the Rottingdean Fair in August, and maybe elsewhere too. This will help refill our coffers and so enable us to provide you with more membership benefits of being part of B&L.

This issue is currently an active focus so I hope to be able to tell you more soon.

What does Sussex BKA do for us?

Well, SBKA runs the annual Bee Market at which we had a stall selling cakes, tea and coffee. B&L did make some money there despite there being, sadly, a lack of home made cakes due to an insurance requirement.

I'm also setting up, together with East Grinstead BKA's Alistair Lee, a series of county-level workshops with SBKA's blessing. The aim is help us learn how the other four divisions run things and maybe they can learn from us too. It's basically a melting pot for ideas and processes.

I'd hope that, by the end of the series, we'll all be more effective at providing better services to the memberships.

Asian Hornet report



Rachel Ramaker
Asian Hornet Team
Co-ordinator

YLH Asian hornet found nearby

The Department for Environment and Rural Affairs (Defra) confirmed a yellow-legged hornet's nest was found in the garage of a house in Shoreham on 6 June.

The department said the nest was quickly destroyed and sent for analysis by a National Bee Unit inspector. (*Source: The Argus, 19 June 2025*)

The National Bee Unit has published new information: When a contingency response is initiated, alerts will be sent out via the Bee Health Advisory Forum, BeeBase News and Defra's yellow-legged hornet confirmed sightings page.

During a response situation, Yellow-legged Asian Hornet teams can support the work of the NBU in a number of ways by

working with the local Regional/Seasonal Bee Inspector (RBI/SBI) to monitor and set up selective traps or monitoring stations, as appropriate locally, ideally where they can be checked regularly.

Monitoring can include observing local forage for up to an hour for yellow-legged hornet activity.

Please register for monitoring by messaging me, Rachel, [here](#).

From the NBU guidance

Once a yellow-legged hornet nest is destroyed, NBU surveillance continues in the area to determine if other nests are present. Surveillance includes the use of monitoring traps near forage and the sites of nests that have been removed. Yellow-legged Asian Hornet Teams can extend NBU's surveillance by monitoring a wider area for longer.

Individuals and nests of yellow-legged hornet found in England and Wales are analysed to understand their:

- Caste: whether it's a queen, drone or worker, and
- Genetic relatedness to other hornets found.

This information helps us understand the potential risk of unreported nests in an area, or whether a nest may have released queens into the environment, which may form a nest the following spring.



Seasonal tips for July

As I write the warm weather we dream of has arrived—although we paid for it with months of cold and rain. This has put the bees back by several weeks, but now the flow is on and the swarm season has started in earnest.

If nothing else, these periods teach us to be patient. If you have made sure your bees are as healthy and as well fed as possible, all you can do is leave it up to them. I know from experience that it can take six weeks from splitting a colony as part of your swarm control procedures to finding newly laid eggs.

By early June, the queen should be laying to her maximum potential and colonies should be reaching maximum brood capacity by early July to capitalise on the flowering of the summer blooms which will continue until late autumn.

You should still continue with regular weekly inspections and be looking out for:

- A queen laying viable brood in a good, close pattern
- Enough room for the queen to lay
- Supers filling up
- Disease
- Sufficient stores until the next inspection
- Presence of queen cells

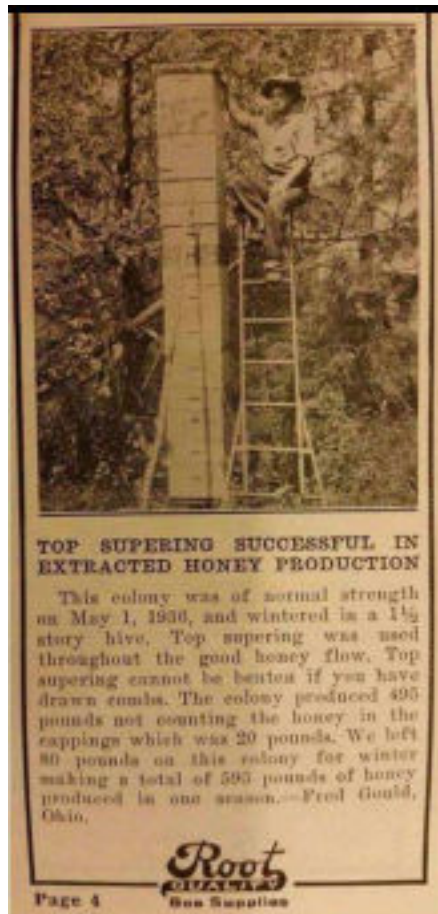
I know that, generally speaking, July is late for colonies to swarm, but they can and do swarm then. It would be a shame to lose half of your workforce just when they're needed, so continue to be vigilant for those swarm cells.

Summer supering

Assuming everything is OK and your colony is not preparing to swarm, then



One vertical egg per cell, laid on the base



Don't let it get this far!

you need to think about providing enough space for the bees to store the nectar. They may need more space than you think.

When nectar is brought into the hive it has a water content of about 80 per cent, and so needs a lot of space. The bees reduce its water content to about 18 per cent and then store and cap it, ready for use later by the bees—or in most cases, the beekeeper.

So, when do you put supers on? If you don't do it soon enough, you risk having it stored in the brood comb, reducing the availability for the queen



A very full frame: Photo: The Apiarist

to lay and possibly inducing the colony to prepare to swarm. Too early or too many will reduce the bees' ability to maintain the right hive temperature suitable for raising brood or, because the warmest part of the colony is in the centre, only the frames above the brood will get filled with honey (known as chimneying or the chimney effect).

So once the brood box has about seven to eight seams of bees, put on the first super, preferably with drawn comb. Once this super is 80 per cent full with nectar put the second one on, again preferably with drawn comb.

Super tips

Why drawn comb? Because it takes a lot of nectar to make wax—about 8kg of nectar for 1kg of wax—and you want to maximise the honey harvest. Sometimes you don't have drawn comb, so either get it drawn early in the season using a rapid feeder or wait until later when there is a flow on with plenty of nectar to go around.

Next, the vexed question of whether you put the new super on top of the original, or under the existing. For me, it makes sense to put the new super under the existing one.

This gives the bees access to a lot of space and can reduce overcrowding in the brood box, it's nearer to the bees storing the nectar and it's warmer, right near the brood. It also makes harvesting easier: the top boxes are the fullest so there's less box manipulation to be done.

You might also consider using



Lots of supers. Photo: Manek Dubash

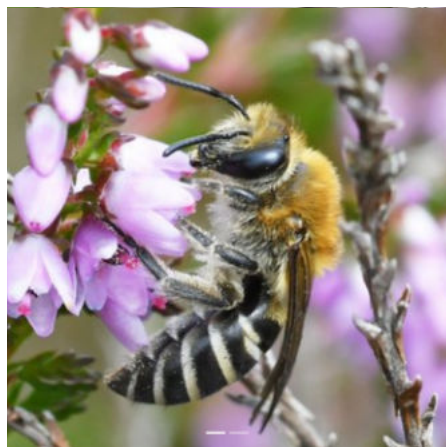
Seasonal tips for July (continued)



Manley frames in your supers: wider than the National frames, they allow the bees to make the honey cells deeper. You get 10 frames in a super. Uncapping is easier too, as the capping is at the same level as the edge of frame sidebar, so you need only to run a serrated knife across the top to uncap.

Honey harvesting

I think most of us use wired super frames and spin out the honey at harvest time leaving us with that ever-so-useful drawn comb. However, there are other ways of harvesting and presenting your honey. The most



Honey bee on heather. Photo: Liam Olds

straightforward method is to use unwired foundation and cut out sections of capped honey: this is known as cut comb.

Purists say that the mid-rib in this type of comb is too thick and suggest a narrow starter strip is used at the top of the frame allowing the bees to draw out the comb, giving a finer structure. Or you could forego the sticky pleasure of cutting up comb and use preformed sections. Again, this uses unwired foundation mounted into 100mm x 100mm frames or 'sections'.

These sections are arranged in rows of four or five across the specially made super, giving about 50 uniform sections to harvest.

Anecdotally, I understand that the bees are not very accepting of this arrangement and will store honey



Cut comb section

anywhere else until they have no choice, so it's not advisable to use a mixture of normal super frames and sections.

Heather or wildflower?

Most of us have to make do with the forage available: wild or cultivated flowers and blossoms in the fields and gardens near our apiaries.

Having said that, it's very surprising to note the vast differences of these honeys, dependent on the time of harvest and the forage available. I've seen some early harvests from Downland apiaries the colour of white Vinho Verde and a harvest from a more wooded area, the colour of used engine oil.

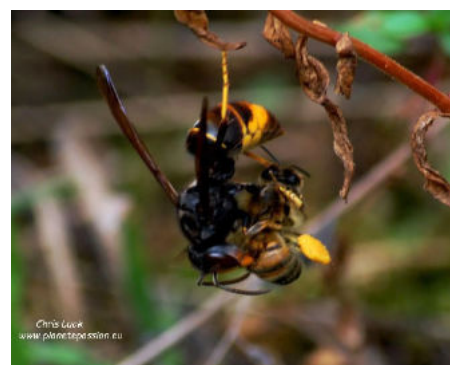
If you are lucky enough to live in the north of our area or are organised enough to move your hives, you may get what some think is the best honey in the world: the fabled heather honey.

Whatever you harvest, I'm sure you will be proud of your achievements and that of your girls and share your bounty with friends and family.

Asian hornets

And finally, although we have yet had no local sighting of the Asian Hornet in our area at the time of going to press—the nearest being a bit close in Shoreham—please keep an eye out for the blighters in your traps. Check the photo below for a gruesome reminder of what they do.

Another veiled beekeeper



Asian hornet dismembers a honey bee. Photo: Chris Lock

Apiary reports

Grassroots

Queen rearing has been the focus at Grassroots: the queen cells have been removed, and taken to Prairie Gardens, and the gardens of Valerie, Katherine and Debbie, as Katherine, Valerie and Stephen have been part of the group and took the cells away to raise them. Katherine and Stephen are raising the queens for B&L—fingers crossed. We hope to send more information about the queens' progress for the next newsletter.

Grassroots will now be preparing for a Honey Bee Health Assessment on 20 June.

Some deep cleaning going on to ensure that the equipment passes muster, then we will move on to the revision sessions for the Basic Assessment candidates.

Despite all the coming and going, the bees are still queen-right and will start their winter preparations beginning 22 June (the longest day). Swarming usually calms down after the summer solstice while the bees make adjustments to the day length and begin collecting stores in preparation for the winter months ahead. We will be demonstrating preparations for winter (yes already!) very soon.

The Miller method

Our queen rearing started at Grassroots on 31 May added some



more 10/06/25 showing queen cells on the frame, being cut off and being put into the nuc(s).

We looked at the Miller Method provided by the National Bee Unit last year with the Apiary Management group, it had to be started three times with a low number of usable queen cells. We thought this might have been because we started too early in the season, the bees wanted to make drone comb/brace comb to repair the comb we cut for them and because we were working with a queen right colony and using a Cloake board. All these elements seemed to frustrate our efforts.

We found Lynfa Davies, Master Beekeeper and NDB, had written a book, *Practical Small Scale Queen*

Rearing using the Miller Method, which offers adaptations worth trying.

On Friday 23 May, two colonies were identified for queen rearing. The donor colony had a blue queen (2025), the cell raiser a red queen (2023) which was removed from her colony. The colony then started to make queen cells and play cups. All queen cells in the colony were knocked down. This colony is now the cell raiser.

The red queen was placed in a nuc; she might make another colony or be used to re-queen the cell raiser colony when the queen cells are removed—although her workers were making queen cells so maybe she won't head up that colony again.

On Wednesday 28 May, Stephen Allen-Tidy and I took two drawn combs into the apiary, found the marked queen, removed two frames of BIAS and replaced them with two frames of drawn comb. Stephen also captured images of that phase.

We marked the replacement frames with drawing pins for easy spotting on Saturday. I made some notes and we closed the colony up. We made tea and talked about the Miller method, and what would happen next. Stephen brought cake, I brought KitKats.

On Friday 30 May, I removed all queen cells in the cell raiser.



Apiary reports

Grassroots (continued)

On Saturday 31 May, phase 4 started. The marked frames were inspected and found to be empty of eggs. Had the queen detected that the drawn comb had the wrong hive smell? She had laid up some dark comb which we could use but only one frame instead of the hoped-for two. We had to work with the bees.

We think that next time we might try leaving the drawn comb in the hive longer or spray with sugar solution for the workers to eat and coat the frames in hive pheromone. The donor colony frames were cut to shape and placed in the cell raiser for the resident bees to create queen cells.

Heidi Burgess, Katherine and I knew the cell builder colony was very keen to make a new queen. Although they were queenless they were not bad tempered, as I had anticipated. We examined the eggs and calculated they were between three and four days old. Most were lying in the bottom of the cells but hadn't yet hatched into larvae. Knowing the age of eggs affects the calculations for cutting out and transferring to a nuc or Apidea for the last stage.

Katherine was very efficient and 'rubbed out' some of the eggs on the edges where we wanted the bees to make queen cells to give us space to



remove them, once created.

The members of the group have been involved with the process step by step, we haven't needed to perfect grafting. We do however, have to be careful when cutting out the queen cells for further development.

The queen cells will be ready to be removed and put into two-frame nucs, or mini-mating nucs or Apidea on days 13 or 14.

The bees in the cell raiser colony have raised five queen cells. This is usually sufficient for a hobbyist beekeeper to raise nucs for the apiary,

replace failing queens, make up for any hopelessly queenless colonies (for whatever reason) and perhaps provide insurance for any over winter losses early next spring to keep weak colonies growing for the season ahead.

We opened up the cell raiser on Tuesday 10 June and re-queened it (blue queen) through newspaper before we left.

We cut out the queen cells and started two nucs: the one that was started for Stephen Allen-Tidy has gone to Prairie Gardens to mate and establish, another went home with Valerie Baxter-Smith and a third with Katherine; she arrived on her bicycle which we didn't think was an appropriate form of travel for a queen, so she was delivered by car and will establish in Katherine's garden!

Queen rearing is easy!

It hasn't cost a fortune to create replacement queens, it wasn't very time consuming, it is sustainable and working within a queen rearing programme to produce locally adapted bees. The next stage is to start breeding for varroa resistance.

*Jude New, Apiary manager
Photos: Stephen Allen-Tidy*



Apiary reports

Rottingdean



A glorious sweeping meadow of poppies in the valley opposite the apiary

You will know from the last two newsletters that I have been busy trying to re-stock the apiary with captured swarms. To date I have seven or eight, most of which began to have brood. But most are now broodless (following supersedure cells appearing). I am guessing that this is

colonies replacing the clapped-out queens they swarmed with and therefore this broodless period is a supersedure gap and therefore temporary: a sad sight. I shall check my theory with the BBKA.

There is one colony with lots of brood—but that was a swarm from my own colony up on the High Barn Apiary. Luckily, they swarmed into the nuc I had lured with a few drops of lemongrass essential oil. But I imagine they will replace their queen sooner rather than later so that there is enough time for the virgin queens to mate and start laying in time to build up their numbers.

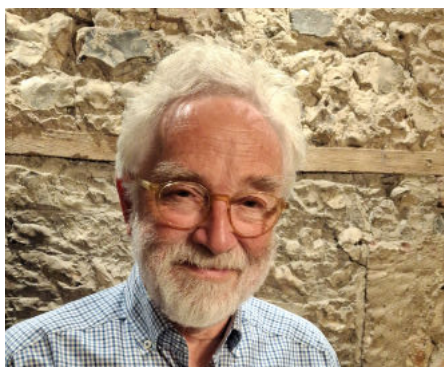
I will be reviewing later in the season which ones to unite so that we go into winter with big colonies (see [my piece on zonal starvation](#), to which small colonies are vulnerable).



A swarm capture bag that I experimented with in capturing a swarm in Rottingdean

Jeff Rodrigues, words and photos

Feature: The honey bee solution to varroa



Peter Coxon, Chairman, Sussex BKA

This article was inspired by Steve Riley's keynote talk at the 2025 SBKA Bee Market—after which feedback was very positive—and his excellent book, 'A Honey Bee Solution to Varroa'. I've also heard him give several excellent talks at the 2024 National Honey Show.

He was kind enough to allow me access to his presentation so that I could share with you some of the

very important points he made.

It is undoubtedly the case that beekeepers treating for varroa in the early 1990s prevented a large-scale collapse of the bee population. However, current thinking is highlighting the rather obvious fact that by treating for varroa we are subverting the process of natural selection, and that for as long as we continue to do so we'll be breeding bees that can't cope with varroa.

The new paradigm

Steve is the Education Officer at Westerham Beekeepers where they, along with many others, are spearheading activities to go treatment-free. Their record of success speaks for itself: circa 130+ colonies not using miticides. They started with 28 and are now in their eighth season of not treating—and they are not alone.

The groups in North Wales on the

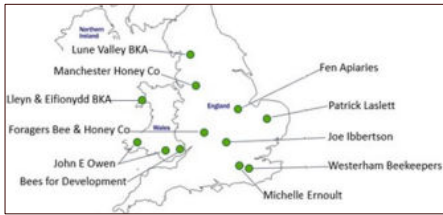
Lleyn Peninsular, Rhona Toft (Foragers Bee & Honey Co, Worcestershire) and many more show similar success stories which you can read about [here](#).

In years gone by treatment-free beekeepers were often derided and scorned for causing problems for other beekeepers. The world-famous Randy Oliver has been heard to talk about such folk causing 'varroa bombs' for others in their area.

However, studies by Tom Seeley in New York's Arnot Forest, Ralph Böhler in Germany and others have shown for many years that feral bees now cope better with varroa than do domestically kept bees.

Steve pointed out that in areas of the world where treatment was never an option on grounds of cost or where treatment was banned on ideological grounds as in Cuba, bees have now evolved to thrive in the presence of varroa.

The honey bee solution to varroa (continued)



Varroa-resistant breeding programmes are underway around the UK

The reluctance to try this is partly due to the idea that ‘it is rather like jumping off a cliff’ and the consequences can be very painful, as I can attest having tried it.

How to make VR bees

What we learn from Steve’s talk and book is that there are much more intelligent ways of going about this and in the presentation he tackled six particular aspects:

1. Why we still have a varroa problem:
 - a. varroa-susceptible bees are dependent on treatments to survive as varroa multiply in unhygienic colonies;
 - b. 9,694 imported queens: not treated, non-resistant, not locally adapted;
 - c. no selection for resistant or hygienic traits from commercial UK suppliers of bees, so people are breeding mite-susceptible bees by not trying to do otherwise.
2. The biology of varroa-resistance

3. Monitoring for varroa-resistant traits
4. Monitoring case studies
Given the amount of data presented in these three sections it would be all but impossible to cover these points in sufficient detail to do them justice.

- a. In short, it’s all about improving where we source bees;
- b. inspecting our bees much more diligently looking for indications of hygienic behaviour, such as:
 - i. monitoring frames to look for uncapping & resealing;
 - ii. examining inspection boards more often and rigorously looking for bits of chewed-out grubs as an indication of hygienic traits, not just counting varroa.

5. Working as a club:
 - a. Set up a breeding apiary focusing on varroa-resistance;
 - b. Westerham Beekeepers breeding apiary set up in 2024
 - i. not-for-profit pricing
 - ii. locally adapted VR bees;
 - iii. Others are following in their wake: Reigate, Chichester and more;
 - c. Aim to provide bees for members—pass on the genetics, avoid bringing poor traits into the area.

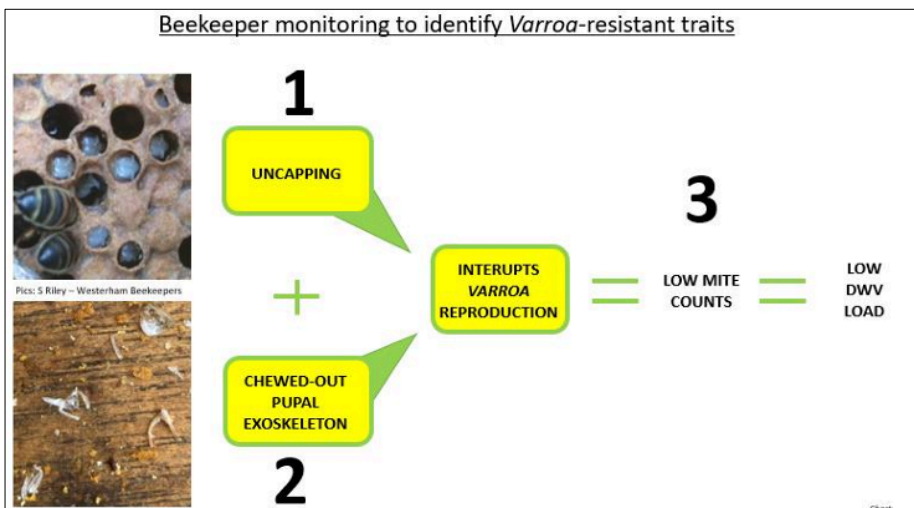
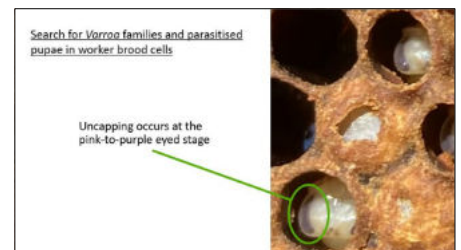


The identification of varroa-resistant traits is key to the process and involves detailed monitoring from the outset

6. Steve’s summary
 - a. varroa-resistant traits are all over the South East and the UK;
 - b. Start a club project and pool the best varroa-resistant bees;
 - c. Be cautious: most are still non-resistant bees. The UK has been breeding, selling and importing them for a long time;
 - d. Don’t buy non-resistant bees. Ask about varroa-resistant traits;
 - e. The pace of change is up to us.

Words by Peter Coxon, Chairman, Sussex Beekeepers Association

Graphics and photos by Steve Riley, Education officer, Westerham Beekeepers Association



above: bald brood—once seen as a problem followed by a recommendation to re-queen, but could be an indication both of hygienic behaviour and that this queen might be good to breed from.

Zonal starvation: make ready

I reckon some people may be thinking ‘why are we talking about Winter in July?!’ I was talking with Manek the other day and I mentioned what I call zonal starvation (also known as isolation starvation I believe). He said please write an article, so here it is.

[And the reason is that the phrase ‘zonal starvation’ is new to me and might be to you too. What’s more, post-solstice the bees are now planning for winter—and so should you be! MD]

In early March, I lost a colony to starvation. Looking at all the sad dead bodies, I nevertheless noticed that there were plenty of stores in the hive, some quite nearby.

I had also put a fair amount of fondant above the cluster. Examining the fondant more closely, I noticed that the bees had eaten into the fondant, making a doughnut shape, with a large hole where they had consumed the sugar and a wide surrounding circular wall of fondant. I wondered why, with so much carbohydrate around, they had died of starvation.

Cold clustering

In winter’s very cold periods (and March was really cold up on the farm in which the Rottingdean apiary wood is located), bees form a tight cluster, about three layers thick. There is a core, the warmest part of the cluster at around 23.5°C (plus 10°C more if there is brood) and a mantle, where the temperature is maintained to at least 8°C.

The mantle bees form an outer insulation for the cluster, wings and bodies tightly aligned side-by-side. When they get dangerously chilled,



Fondant on hive. Photo: David Evans



they move inward and their places get taken by bees in the core or the middle layer, like members of a cycling peloton slipstreaming in a headwind.

Temperature is controlled by activating the big wing muscles—this is very expensive in fuel and ready access to carbs is critical.

My colony that died was a small one. I suspect they would not have been able to maintain a three-layer cluster, so they would have to have worked hard and long to maintain the appropriate temperatures and thus, would have needed the fondant and their own stores.

Breaking the cluster

Behaviourally, it’s hard for bees in very low temperatures to leave the cluster for food because their inbuilt trait to protect the core is a key driver of what they decide. Plus, they may prefer to go up rather than sideways.

Consuming the fondant a few millimetres above is probably within their behaviour boundaries. So, they ate directly above.

But at some point, the distance to fondant got beyond the accepted boundary as the circle of emptiness above them got wider and wider. And at that point, despite the existence of

sustenance within a few millimetres, they starved to death.

Starvation explained

It seems odd that the bees (to put it anthropomorphically) ‘would rather starve than leave the cluster’. I don’t remember Lars Chittka* in his super book mentioning this so I am left trying to find a behavioural explanation and this is my go at it.

So, what should we do to help? Minimise opening the hive, but on comparatively warmer days quickly move frames with honey immediately adjacent to the cluster. Make sure there is a thick layer of fondant directly above the cluster.

If they move the cluster (they sometimes do, apparently), move the fondant. And put good quality insulation above and maybe around the hive—the B&L WhatsApp chats have mentioned sheep fleeces bought locally.

Size matters

Above all, try to form larger colonies before going into winter. The National Bee Unit says 9,000 bees or five seams is a minimum and the closer the colony can be to 20,000 the better the chance of survival.

All those swarms you collected so far—don’t let them go into winter smaller than 9,000: unite with another 9,000-strong swarm colony!

Jeff Rodrigues

* *The Mind of a Bee, Princeton, 2022: a groundbreaking book*



Starved bees: the aftermath

Summer/autumn events

Date	Event	Location	Leader(s)
Saturday 12 July	Basic assessment	Grassroots apiary	Jude & Assessors
Saturday 12 July	First aid	Westdene Barn	Joy & paramedic
Saturday 19 July	Honey bee health	Bee Safari, Hove	Adrien, Jessica, Ian, Joy
Wednesday 23 July	First aid	Ringmer Village Hall	Jude & paramedic
Saturday 26 July	The repair shop	Westdene Barn	Ross, Jessica, Jude
Friday 8 August	Honey harvesting	Hove apiary	Adrien
Friday 8 August	Honey harvesting	Grassroots apiary	Jude
Saturday 9 August	Removing supers	Hove apiary	Adrien
Saturday 9 August	Removing supers	Grassroots apiary	Jude
Saturday 16 August	Extraction	Westdene Barn	Graham
Saturday 6 September	Basic Assessment graduation	The Open House	Jude
Saturday 13 September	Hastings & Rother BKA Honey Show	Robertsbridge Village Hall	
Saturday 4 October	Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers Honey Show	Seaford (tbc)	

Bee Chats

Wednesday 9 July, The Hope Inn, Newhaven

Wednesday 6 August, The Cock Inn, Ringmer

Newsletter deadlines

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

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B&L Facebook Group

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National Honey Show Rep: Vacant

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