

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

NEWSLETTER DECEMBER 2025

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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.

EDITORIAL



Given there's not much bee-bothering underway right now, B&L sure has been busy.

From our Asian Hornet Team Co-

ordinator Rachel's comprehensive report on the outcome of the dreaded insect's activities in France and Spain to updates on the wax workshop, our October and November meetings and a thoughtful reflection on varroa treatments, this edition of your award-winning newsletter is brimming with news and views. Enjoy!

Treatments

Talking of varroa, this year will see my conversion entirely from oxalic acid

sublimation to trickle treating with VarroMed, a concoction that combines oxalic and formic acids.

I've switched for this winter in part because I would prefer my nadired supers not to be coated in OA sublimate, as it then means I can be more flexible with their placement later in the season, but also because I find it quite tricky sealing up every hive to make the most effective use of vaporised OA. Wish I didn't have to do any of this at all, of course ([see p8](#)).

Anyway, we shall see how many survive the winter...

PS: You can find a copy of our newsletter's award certificate on the back page, its permanent home.

Manek Dubash, Editor

December 2025 events

Date	Event	Location	Leader
Mon 1 December	Festive dinner	Open House, Brighton	
Wed 21 January	From Swarms to Swimming Pools	Lewes	Simon Tuck
Wed 18 February	AGM	Lewes	

Bee Chats start at 19.30. Open meetings start at 19.00 for 19.30.

You can find the full list of 2025-26 events and meetings [on the back page](#).

ONLINE

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



QR link to B&L website

Notes from the Chair



Manek Dubash
Chairman

I'd like to extend hearty congratulations to long-standing B&L member and previous Meetings Secretary Bob Curtis, who had a massive series of wins at this year's National Honey Show (NHS) and South of England Agricultural Society Honey Show (SEAS). Understandably delighted, he scooped the following awards:

NHS results

- Class 142: One Microscope Slide 'Honey Bee Anatomy' - Commended
- Class 143: Photomicrograph in colour or black/white - 1st
- Class 144: Colour Print, not close up - 3rd
- Class 145: Colour Print, Close-up or

Macro - Very Highly Commended

- Class 146: Black and white Print - Highly Commended
- Class 341: Two Jars Light Honey (Sussex members only) - 2nd
- Class 344: Two Jars Naturally Crystallised Honey (Sussex members only) - 2nd
- Class 348: One Jar Clear Honey (Gift) (Sussex only) - Highly Commended

SEAS results

- Class 4: Two Jars Light Honey - 1st
- Class 6: Two Jars Naturally Crystallised Honey - 1st
- Class 13: 1 pair of candles - 2nd
- Class 16: Photograph - 2nd

Yellow-legged Asian Hornet report



Rachel Ramaker
Asian Hornet Team
Co-ordinator

I have been reading newspaper articles from France and Spain about *Vespa velutina*.

Spain

During the past month, three men were killed in separate incidents in Galicia by the Yellow Legged Asian Hornet. Normally, the insects are dormant around this time but due to abnormally dry and hot weather, they are remaining active for much longer.

Hornets attacked the victims while they working outdoors, chainsaw or brush cutter in hand. The buzzing of engines, the vibrations, the sudden movements: so many signals perceived as aggression by these insects. The danger is all the greater as their nests, often hidden at ground level or between the bushes, go unnoticed.

Over 6,300 nest reports were recorded in Galicia in October, a seasonal record. Since January, a shocking 230,000 queens have been captured—twice last year's total.

France

Recent strong winds and autumn leaf fall across France mean that many Asian hornet nests built during the summer are now visible, leading to potential issues for gardeners.

Despite the cold, hornets are still active. Official advice is to call a pest controller and have nests destroyed.

In most parts of the country these will cost from €150 to €200, depending on distance

and access difficulty.

At first, in 2004 the year the hornets arrived and were first spotted, local fire brigades destroyed nests as a community service. They found that half-centimetre-long hornet stings could pierce standard-issue leather firefighter jackets.

The authorities at first thought that the nests were not cause for undue alarm and that Asian hornets would die in typical European winters.

However, we now know that it takes temperatures of -30°C, not seen since the last ice age in France, to kill all the hornets, which remain in hibernation in the deepest folds of the nests.

There is no national register of the number of deaths from Asian hornet attacks, although surveys of newspaper reports suggest there have been at least five in France. Some of these have been when nests have fallen from trees onto the ground, resulting in hornets attacking passing people or vehicles.

Back in the UK

Luckily we are not yet in the same position as Spain and France. I am taking part in a series of meetings to discuss new guidance for Asian Hornet Teams. I have plans to reorganise the way we work based on this guidance and last year's experience.

You will find information about that in the next newsletter.

December: winter is embedded

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 not weather-dependent. 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. Photo: Bob Curtis

Fondant recipe:

- 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 are the same thing; it's the method where the OA crystals are inserted into 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 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 it in 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

Apiary reports

Rottingdean

Our bees were actively foraging hitherto but are now, as temperatures have descended below 10°C, clustered loosely. That means they will move up to get fondant if they need it. When the temperatures stay stubbornly below, say, 5°C, they will form a fairly immobile, tight cluster, three deep. The core will be over 31°C ('cos there is brood right now) and the outside



layer will be close to the ambient temperature. If the outer layer of the mantle gets close to 8°C, they will be replaced by the middle mantle bees—a bit like a cycling peloton in a headwind.

Winter winds

The apiary is situated in a small wood, but, without leaf cover now, it is still susceptible to the biting north and east winds. Additionally, I found this year that spring arrives a little later up there than in the village, so we have begun putting up some windbreaks. Julie made some from black bamboo foraged from Kipling Gardens (see pics). I bought another tall bamboo screen from a B&L member. They're fixed loosely so that they can give with the wind...hopefully.

We'll take them down when the spring arrives so that the rising sun's rays can reach the hives.

We're going into winter with seven colonies, four of which are strong and a couple that cover about six or seven seams. We came out of winter 2024 with five colonies but by the first week of April we'd lost four, so...fingers

crossed.

Varroa monitoring will be completed this time next week and, if needed, I'll get the vaporiser ready for treatment closer to Christmas.

When a free moment arrives, I'll read through my inspection notes to see what patterns and lessons emerge.

Happy Christmas

Julie and I hope you have a happy time over the festive season, insulated a little from the turbulent and worrying world we are now living through.

*Jeff Rodrigues, Apiary Manager
(Words and photos)*



B&L Honey Show: photo competition

Our Honey Show, as we reported last month, was a success but we weren't able to bring you the full results of the photographic competitions.

We did it differently this year. Previously, the photos were submitted digitally but this time we went back to old tech: the photos were printed out and judged by the attendees at the show, rather than by photographers as in previous years.

Results

We don't have digital versions of the photos so—sadly—I can only bring you the results but not the photos: the

winner in both categories was B&L Secretary Mat Budgen.

I want to emphasise that attendees at the show judged the photos without knowing the photographer's identity.

Entrants

Class 11: Bee-Related Photograph

- Stephen Allen-Tidy
- Graham Bubloz
- Mat Budgen [winner]
- Joy Garnsey
- Gerald Legg
- Rachel Ramaker

Class 12: Close-up Shot of a Bee

- Stephen Allen-Tidy
- Graham Bubloz
- Mat Budgen [winner]
- Joy Garnsey
- Gerald Legg
- Rachel Ramaker
- Miriam Uzzaman

Congratulations to Mat—and here's hoping for more entrants (and maybe a return to digital entries?) in 2026.

Note that the standalone AGM will be held on 18 February 2026.

Manek Dubash, Editor

January meeting: From swarms to swimming pool

The speaker at our next winter meeting is Simon Tuck, the newly anointed Master Beekeeper from Eastbourne Beekeepers' Association.

He'll be talking about how to keep bees considerately.

Simon contends that beekeeping is as much about being a good neighbour

as it is about caring for our colonies. In this talk, he shares his experience of managing bees responsibly in our increasingly populated landscape—from preventing swarms and dealing with temperament, to keeping bees out of hot tubs and off washing lines.

With practical tips, real-life

examples, and a dose of good humour, Simon explores how thoughtful husbandry can help us all keep our bees—and our neighbours—happy.

Details: 19.00 for 19.30, 21 January, Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Lewes.

Success! Max fun was had at the wax workshop



Oh man...you missed it, the wax workshop was on 1 November from 1.00-4.30 pm.

We had a blast turning sticky cappings into things of beauty.

We had cake, tea and coffee served from the kitchen by Stephen Allen-Tidy. He's hot on health and safety and food safety; the kitchen was spotless during service (and when he had finished it was still sparkling!).

Candles galore

Heidi B made decorated rolled candles with pre bought coloured candle making foundation. This process



needed concentration, cutting boards and Stanley knives! Heidi also demonstrated making dipped candles. The candles were weighted with metal nuts tied to the waxed wicks then dipped into molten wax. The candles were left to hang on a candle tree for cutting for storage and use. They are very special don't you think?

Melts

Jessica was making beeswax melts. A wax melter was lit, to provide the full experience. Yesterday the melts had peppermint essential oils as part of the mix, they can be 'flavoured' with any other essential oils suitable for burning (they were sourced from Amazon and chosen for that purpose) There are some lovely blends of essential oils for wax melters which could be used instead. She also made body lotion with beeswax, oil and essential oils.

Polishes

Jane was making food-safe wood polish and lip balm. The wood polish was made with mineral oils mixed with beeswax to make a soft polish. This can be used on wooden chopping boards and wooden spoons to seal them and feed the wood after washing. She also made lip balm with bees wax, oil and flavourings there was a choice of strawberry, orange and chocolate. From the picture Stephen took, they liked the smell.



Feedback

Feedback from all participants was very positive, the only thing they missed was the beeswax wraps—we didn't have anyone to demonstrate them, this time. It worked well for Hilary, who was selling them!

We all had a great time in the warm and dry of Patcham Memorial Hall, we



More overleaf...

Success! Max fun was had at the wax workshop (cont.)



sold Brighton and Lewes honey from Hove, a selection of hand-crafted bee related goods from Hilary and made at least two recipes each which raised just over £300 for divisional funds, before deductions.

*Jude New, Meetings Secretary
Photos: Jude & Manek*



B&L payments and fees update for 2026

Our year currently runs from 1 January to 31 December. Consequently, membership renewal fees are due in the month of December 2025.

This year, I am offering everyone the ability to renew online using a card payment.

You'll get a reminder from me—so please keep an eye open for that. If you have any problems with this new arrangement, please contact me and I'll assist. *[Graham's very helpful and rarely bites! Ed.]*



Fees increase in 2026

Unfortunately, the membership rates for 2026 have slightly increased. Full

membership is now £34.00 *per annum*. Friend membership (for anyone without bees) is £13.00 *per annum*. Please note that if you have a differing number of hives from the renewal notification, let me know and we can resolve it together.

The full set of membership rates offered at Brighton & Lewes BKA is on the following link: https://www.brightonlewesbeekeepers.co.uk/?page_id=5079

*Graham Bubloz,
Membership Secretary & Treasurer*

Meeting reports: October and November

Ciaran Harris: Seasonal food for bees

Ciaran came in person on 19 October to present some of his research into the problems bees and other pollinators face in the modern world.

He's a postdoctoral researcher into insect ecology, conservation, and behaviour. His PhD at Sussex University's LASI examined seasonal changes in food availability for bees' other flower-visiting insects, aiming to determine the seasons that are most challenging for pollinator foraging.

In his talk, he highlighted bee decline in UK and Netherlands. Global figures show catastrophic decline in Europe in the 1990s, with some recovery underway but the causes depressingly familiar: agricultural practices, pesticides, herbicides, loss

of habitats and forage for all pollinators.

Conservation schemes do improve things such as wildflower margins, clover planting, and no-mow May, he said.

He researched when bees struggled most to get food. Seasonality is underappreciated with key metrics being lots of competition and the numbers of flowers. If demand and supply match, all is well; he wanted to discover periods of mismatch.

For example, he measured uncollected ivy nectar that was crystallised on the flower. With ivy flowers accessible to all pollinators, why the oversupply?

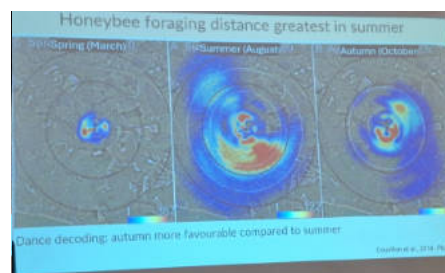
He found that the picture was

similar in other countries and the problem was a lack of pollinators, with the problem most acute in August. The shortage of pollinators is driven by a loss of habitat, such as hedgerows, among other drivers. Clover is no longer used as a cover crop or rotation; there's a loss of wildflower meadows and hedgerows; most arable plants are not summer flowers.

Ciaran was happy to stay behind to chat after the formal part of the meeting and was engaged in a number of lively conversations.

Once again, thanks are due to the excellent catering team of Jude and Heidi B.

Manek Dubash



Kevin Thorn: The sustainable apiary

Kevin addressed us over Zoom on a chilly 19 November evening, talking about sustainable beekeeping.

Once a businessman, now a full-time beekeeper, he said he was down to 50 hives. "Only 10 per cent of my colonies swarm", he said, his aim being to maximise the honey output while minimising the input of effort, that is sustainability.

The question is though, how a hobbyist can be sustainable. According to the Coloss survey, average losses are 10-30% in winter and 10-20% in summer—but what's important is that local bees survive longest. And that's because local viruses have different strains, and

local bees are better adapted to them.

Equipment required: two hives, one strong colony, a spare brood box, three nucs, two triple stands, two feeders.

Steps: wait until hive is full egg start of the flow (April /May). Add 2nd BB underneath and feed. Wait 3-5 weeks, at which point you will have 16+ frames of brood. So a walk away split: equalise frames, set up a floor, smoke heavily from below so bees move up. Move the top box to the new floor, and the flying bees remaining in the bottom box will make new queen.

In May, take brood box frames out, take two frames of sealed brood, two of open brood, two frames of stores,

foundation. Add a queen excluder. The bees move up, leaving the queen behind.

This can be repeated two or three times per season. It delays the swarm urge and if the queen doesn't fill more than seven frames, split the hive and start again. If this doesn't work, as 20% of queens don't mate well, so let them supersede.

The short talk concluded with a couple of questions, followed by the traditional chat, tea and excellent cakes, thanks to Ross, Jude and others, as well as Norman for the seamless tech.

Manek Dubash

Thoughts from the National Honey Show 2025

Dealing with varroa—some reflections on the National Honey Show presentations



Since beginning beekeeping about 15 years ago, I have found the concept of treating bees for varroa to be somewhat uncomfortable. Following the inadvertent introduction of varroa in 1992, after which treatment became essential and without which bee colonies and British apiculture would probably have crashed, the evolution of bee health management has raised important issues.

Terminologies such as ‘treatment-free beekeeping,’ ‘hygienic bees,’ and ‘varroa-resistant bees’ had become conflated in many minds, and in some quarters, prompted considerable contention and even hostility.

However, the work of leading luminaries such as Professor Tom Seeley, with his investigations into wild bee populations in New York’s Arnot Forest, similar research from Ralph Büchler in Germany, and studies by Professor Stephen Martin, Joe Ibbertson, and Stephen Riley in the UK, among others—has greatly enhanced our understanding of the issues, and brought scientific objectivity based on data.

Varroa-resistance focus

Notably, this year’s National Honey Show had a strong focus on breeding varroa-resistant and hygienic bees. Of the seventeen talks, six addressed this subject exclusively, with contributions from respected experts such as Professor Stephen Martin, Steve Riley, Jo Ibbotson, and Professor Richard Pickard.

Their extensive experience and rigorous research underpin compelling arguments in favour of selective breeding. The Sussex BKA sponsored one of Professor Martin’s sessions, so I had the privilege of introducing his talk and facilitating the subsequent discussion.

A separate panel Q&A session directly addressed concerns and misconceptions about breeding varroa-resistant bees.

One key point, highlighted by Steve Riley, questioned how we define a healthy colony: is it one that requires regular chemical intervention, or one that thrives independently through adaptation in its natural environment? Increasing numbers of colonies

worldwide are surviving without treatments, indicating successful evolutionary responses.

Meaning matters

Clarification of the terms ‘treatment-free beekeeping,’ ‘hygienic bees,’ and ‘varroa-resistant bees’ is essential. Fostering the latter two traits should not be seen as controversial, given humanity-driven husbandry has been selecting for desirable characteristics in livestock and crops such as better sheep, cattle, wheat, rice etc over very many millennia, a practice that has yielded substantial benefits for humanity.

Applying these principles to apiculture by selectively breeding for natural hygienic behaviours is a logical extension. Bees do thrive in diverse environments globally, including Africa, South America, with minimal intervention.

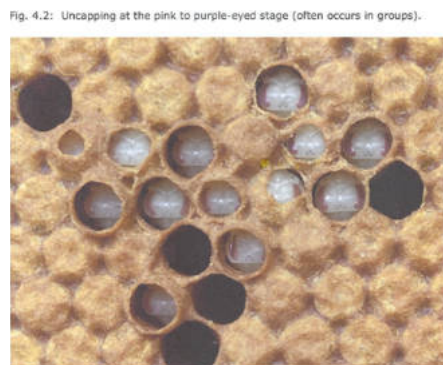
In Cuba, for example, government regulation and economic restrictions on treatments mean bees have never been treated for varroa, which has led to naturally adapted, varroa-resilient populations that are thriving.

Guidance galore

There is now accessible guidance on improving beekeeping practices. Steve Riley’s book, *The Honey Bee Solution to Varroa*, provides excellent practical advice, emphasising careful observation of colonies and selection for hygienic behavioural traits, such as brood uncapping and evidence of varroa-infected larval removal on the



Pupal remains on the varroa floor.
Photo: Steve McGrath/BIBBA



Picture: Steve Riley.



Photo by Alex Wild

Thoughts from the National Honey Show 2025 (cont.)

inspection board by chewing out and cannibalisation.

What to do

The recommended approach involves propagating from such colonies and re-queening less resilient hives accordingly. Or as Stephen Martin joked, giving them to people you don't like. Space does not permit a full description here, but I strongly recommend consulting Riley's book and resources such as the website *Varroa resistant's* varroa calculator [here](#) and BIBBA [here](#).

Ultimately this will enable us to go 'treatment free'. In the past some people have simply gone treatment free, somewhat akin to the folks irrationally against big pharma simply quitting conventional treatment in the hope that trying whole foods or whatever—with the inevitable consequences.

Bankrupt policy

The alternative to better observation and husbandry by continuing down the treatment route seems a bleak and bankrupt policy. Last year in the USA, colony numbers collapsed again and it

is currently thought this to be a consequence of varroa having adapted to the vastly preferred varroicide in the US: Amitraz!

So, what next? More new chemicals, driven by the economics of pollination and requirement for cheap honey? This is not sustainable!

Two other talks were by Humberto Boncristiani about the unpredictable and potentially disastrous consequences of dumping a cocktail of literally thousands of toxic chemicals unto the environment every year, and how the combinatorial effects increasing toxicity that are as yet both largely unstudied and unknown.

Imports

Another other very serious concern raised relates to the number of queens currently imported into this country, largely but not exclusively by bee farmers and driven again by economics. The vast majority come from countries where there is no selection for hygienic traits at all and colonies are heavily treated. Many so called 'UK suppliers' are not in fact breeders at all but importers. It is also believed that it is via these routes that

we will inevitably be faced the problem of tropilaelaps too.

Message: Don't buy queens unless they're from a reputable source and don't be afraid to ask lots of questions.

On a slightly more positive note, it is thought that bees displaying hygienic behaviour as evidenced by copious uncapping are more likely to cope with tropilaelaps when it arrives—an added incentive if one were necessary.

Uncapping, which the NBU until quite recently referred to as 'bald brood' and was thought to be a genetic defect that required re-queening, is now seen as very desirable trait. After all bees have uncapped to combat other problems such as wax moth, chalk brood, and sac brood etc. long before varroa arrived on our shores.

On another positive note there is now a Europe-wide initiative to become treatment free by 2033 "[Varroa Resistance 2033](#)", i.e. no miticides by 2033. Use Google or similar to translate unless you are fluent in German.

Say NO to varroa!

*Peter Coxon
Chairman, Sussex BKA*

Photos by Mim: season's end at Hove Apiary



Winter/spring events

Date	Event	Location	Leader
Mon 1 December	Festive dinner	Open House, Brighton	
Wed 21 Jan	From Swarms to Swimming Pools	Lewes	Simon Tuck
Wed 18 February	B&L AGM	Lewes	
Wed 18 March 2026	Apitherapy & medicines	Lewes	Chris Park
Wed 15 April 2026	tba		

Bee Chats

- 19:00 in a pub. December: no meeting. January: yes meeting (?)

Winter meetings in Lewes

- From 19:00 for 19:30, Eastgate Church Hall, Eastgate Street, Lewes BN7 2LR

From our neighbours

West Sussex Beekeepers' Annual Convention, 28 February 2026, 09.30-16.30. Lodge Hill, Pulborough, West Sussex RH20 1LZ. Booking required, details [here](#).

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 newsletter's award certificate



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 Rottingdean: Jeff Rodrigues

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Sussex BKA Representatives:
 Ian White & Manek Dubash

National Honey Show Rep: Vacant

Disclaimer: Brighton and Lewes Division of the Sussex Beekeepers Association cannot accept any responsibility for loss, injury or damage sustained by persons in consequence of their participation in activities arranged by the Division.