

# Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

## NEWSLETTER JANUARY 2025

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### EVENTS

- Winter events
- Festive fare
- Wax workshop

### NEXT MONTH

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

### EDITORIAL



While there's not a lot happening on the bee-bothering front this

Closer to home is West Sussex BKA's Annual Convention on 28 February. The main speakers are Prof Giles Budge, Dr Ben Woodcock and Prof Patricia Wiltshire, plus seminars run by Prof Budge, Simon Tuck, Dylan Gussman and Peter Smith. Check it out [here](#).

month, there's lots to look forward in the next few months.

I want to plug the BBKA Spring Convention again: it consists of three days of lectures, talks, chat, excellent food, and a trade show thrown in. I plan to go in 2026—it'll be my fourth time—because it's fun, it's excellent value for money, and you get to swap stories with beekeepers from other areas and walks of life. Check it out [here](#).

#### Last thoughts for 2025

I want to congratulate Heidi Burgess on passing her BBKA Honey Bee Health Module. And I'd like to wish everyone a warm and happy Christmas season, and good fortune for the upcoming beekeeping year.

*Manek Dubash, Editor*

### 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.

## January 2026 events

Date	Event	Location	Leader
Wed 7 January	Bee Chat	Thatched Inn, Hassocks	Debbie Cole
Wed 21 January	From Swarms to Swimming Pools	Lewes	Simon Tuck
Monday 26 January	Honey Bee Health Module support group	Zoom	Jude
<b>Wed 18 February</b>	<b>AGM</b>	<b>Lewes</b>	

**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*

Money. Invented back in pre-history, it's the bane of our lives—especially here at B&L: our cash reserves have taken a bit of a bashing over the last year or two.

Right now, we hold about £4,000 in the bank, which Treasurer Graham Bubloz reports is insufficient to meet anticipated expenditure, much of it on apiary equipment and infrastructure. Compared to other local beekeeping associations, we are cash-poor.

This lack of funds hobbles our ability to undertake new initiatives, one such suggestion being helping members fund the taking of BBKA exam modules. A nice idea...

### **Current overheads**

We run four apiaries, and hold four to six physical winter meetings plus regular apiary visits during the season. We also need a new shed at our Grassroots apiary, then there's the cost of fresh foundation for the upcoming season. That's what we spend it on.

Training and events, such as the Honey Show, usually raise more than they cost and we do a lot of that—many thanks to Jude for her sterling efforts. However, it still not enough so what do?

### **Getting the balance right**

The answer, as always, is to find a balance between pulling in our horns and doing

less, or raise more cash. I believe it would be fair to say that the committee tends towards the latter strategy.

To that end, the last committee meeting decided to increase the meeting fee—the charge on the door—to £3; it's been £1 for well over a decade without increase and is clearly not as financially useful as it was.

We also discussed inviting the public to apiary meetings as a beekeeping experience. Not only might this increase our membership, it could bring in some additional cash too. We could sell vouchers for the experience; Jude is working on it.

Other options we discussed include starting a 100 club, and charging members for apiary meetings.

### **Looking ahead**

We're looking too at how neighbouring divisions such as High Weald BKA manage, and at more community funding—Lewes Town Council donated £500 to help set up our Rottingdean apiary, for example.

So if you have an insight into areas we may not have explored—perhaps sponsorship by a local business—please let Graham or any of the committee know.

I'd be glad to hear your opinions about this. Do you feel you pay enough already or do you think it's fair to pay more for the benefits that B&L brings? And do you have ideas that could help us raise money?

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## Yellow-legged Asian Hornet report



**Rachel Ramaker**  
*Asian Hornet Team*  
*Co-ordinator*

In the December 2025 Bee Health Advisory Forum, Defra confirmed that it will not ask APHA's National Bee Unit to carry out spring trapping activity in 2026.

This is in response to the high number and geographic spread of 2025's later season nest finds. Finding and destroying nests is considered to be the most effective control mechanism. Spring trapping involves looking for a small number of queen hornets in large area and is not the best way to achieve effective control.

So a government-led, systematic trapping programme will not be carried out in 2026.

To help inform local trapping initiatives, the NBU is working with Fera Science

Limited to review 2025's data and supply mapping information of areas it considers to be higher risk, due to the time of year nests were located and destroyed.

Defra says it's committed to combatting this threat and, while there is no strong evidence of YLH establishment, will continue to support an eradication policy. APHA's National Bee Unit stands ready to respond to reports of YLHs during 2026.

Please report sightings of Yellow-legged hornets (YLH), also known as Asian hornets, either using this [online form](#) or download the free Asian Hornet Watch app for Apple and Android devices.

## 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

### Varroa treatment

Varroa treatment, if not already done, 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.

### 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.

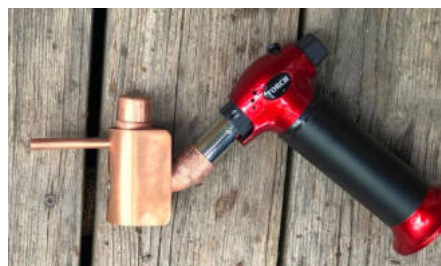
Non-beekeepers ask me if bees hibernate. To which I reply: no, they behave like penguins in the Antarctic. The cluster centre can be between 18-32°C with an outside temperature of 9-14°C. The bees generate heat by flexing their flight muscles and the cooler ones work their way into the centre and swap 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.

### 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 good sign, as it shows that housekeeping activity is going on and



Using a GasVap reduces the varroa load.

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.

It's also a good time to look for new



The boxes were upside down and badly warped, but the bees were fine.

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

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

Look forward to a better season!

*The Veiled Beekeeper*

## Apiary reports

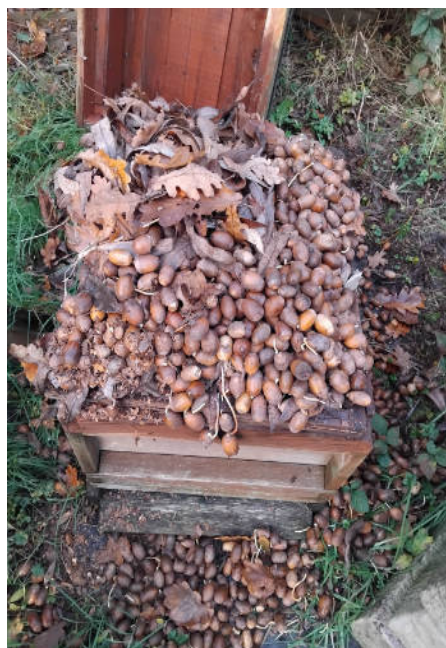
### Grassroots

The last days in November felt like a good time to check the bees.

The temperatures were in double figures, not very high, and dry.

I put on my clogs and immediately I went into the apiary regretted not wearing full wellies, the grass has grown in three weeks and was very wet! The hives have been spread about in the apiary, to give more than three feet between each and two nucs are overwintering well.

I opened each hive and either looked through the crown board to see where the bees were or removed the crown board long enough to assess the fondant levels and bee activity. One hive had a wasp under the roof—it saw no more sunsets!



Most of the colonies still had fondant to use, one colony has died out, I am not sure if the wasps were responsible or if they were just making use of the empty hive for food. There were a few dead bees on the OMF and the hive was cold so taking the frames out to try to discover the cause was impossible, the propolis had set solid. I closed the hive up to prevent further robbing, and I will remove the hive and parts when I can.

Due to weather conditions, wasps, European hornets and robbing I have started feeding the bees at Grassroots with fondant much earlier than normal. The colonies stores were low when I took the Apiguard off and because of robbing I put fondant on the hives instead of syrup at the end of the summer.

I spotted that a bait hive on the edge of the apiary had a hole in the roofing felt, I took a close look in case it was woodpecker activity. I would have needed to find the chicken wire to



wrap the hives if that had been the case. None of the hives looked damaged... With difficulty I lifted the bait hive roof—it was wet and heavy and my clogs were covered in acorns as I lifted the roof off. The space was packed to capacity with them, some were sprouting. When I took my phone out to get a quick pic, an adult mouse ran out. I moved a few leaves, which you can see in one corner, to find a baby mouse too.

I replaced the lid for the mice to sort out. The bees would have dealt with them if they were inside a hive with a colony, and they didn't seem to be doing any harm.

*Jude New, Apiary Manager*



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## January meeting: From swarms to swimming pool

The speaker at our next winter meeting in Lewes is Simon Tuck, the newly anointed Master Beekeeper from Eastbourne Beekeepers' Association. He'll be talking about how to keep bees considerately.

For Simon, beekeeping is as much

about being a good neighbour as it is about caring for our colonies. He will be sharing 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.

## Apiary reports

### Rottingdean

I was walking to the Apiary last Monday when I struck up a conversation with a woman walking her dog. At one point she said: "Have you seen those solar things they've put on those red postboxes? Well, I'm the Saltdean knitter and I can't put the head covers any more!"

I was quietly thrilled not to have to see any more of them. "I'm not knitting now, I don't know what to do." My attitude softened. "Anyway, what are you dressed up like that for?" I replied, lightheartedly: "I am a beekeeper—perhaps you can knit coats for my beehives?" "Ooh!", she enthused: "When can I come and measure up?" Help!

When I got to the apiary, I realised that one of the small colonies had died, but the other six seemed to be thriving, which eased the pain quite a lot.

We've put two windbreaks up, made from bamboo re-cycled from Kipling gardens. They survived the winds this week but the winds blew away all the AH traps.

I met one of those beekeeping colleagues who anthropomorphise their bees (which I, grumpy as I can be, find mildly grating) on the number 12 from Brighton.

"I visited the girls yesterday. They were really busy, foraging all over the ivy. Of course, I didn't see Her Majesty



but I think there must be babies 'cos the forage being taken in was plentiful."

I noticed quizzical looks from a couple in a neighbouring seat. I began to shift uncomfortably. He carried on loudly and oblivious: "Course, all the boys have been killed off or starved." The couple looked around sharply. I smiled weakly, then realised this implicated me, as if I was an accomplice in some sort of crime against the person (or persons, in this case). Luckily, my colleague got off in the Black Rock area but I had to endure alarming stares all the way to Rottingdean. I'm surprised they didn't take a photo to show the police.

I've tried my hand at candle-making. Ruined the look of my new gas hob and got wax all over the kitchen floor but here is a pic of my results. My favourite, the tapering ridged cone, is also the most difficult to unmould. Any experienced candlemakers out there have some advice?

*Jeff Rodrigues, Apiary Manager*

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## Honey Bee Health assessment



### Examinations & Assessments

The BBKA work to raise the standards of beekeeping through a series of training courses and examinations.

B&L is inviting all members to take part in the forthcoming honey bee health assessment support group.

This group aims to help those planning or thinking about taking or just following the syllabus for the BBKA Honey Bee Health module.

To help us to plan and gauge numbers, please complete this simple registration form [here](#). There will be a small fee of £20.00 to cover admin.

### General information

Brighton and Lewes Beekeepers are keen to help our members to improve their knowledge and skills in a number of ways.

Gain knowledge and confidence by taking the [BBKA exams](#). A flow chart of the training process can be found [here](#).

There is usually a small charge to cover administration, catering and stationary costs for all courses.

### Action points

For more details of these or other training and education events see the relevant page and/or contact Jude New, on our WhatsApp Buzz group or our Facebook page.

*Jude New, Training Co-ordinator*

## B&L's Christmas dinner

Did you know about our festive meal at The Open House on Monday 1 December?

We split into four teams (five teams actually—Heidi Burgess and I were the team who set it up, with trepidation!) and started with a silly game, (which actually became competitive on an unexpected scale). The challenge was to make a model Asian Hornet in 20 minutes with provided craft materials: there were fights for Fanta bottles, Sellotape, pipe cleaners for antennae, and tissue

paper. Can you imagine who was in the team which also made a bee for the hornet to hawk? Each hornet was marked for accuracy of colour, stripes, legs and recorded.

There was a quiz written and overseen by Heidi Burgess. Each group's questions were marked and added to the first score. One of the tricky set of questions involved honey tasting, can you see some tables have pots of liquid gold and coffee stirrers to taste and match six different honeys. Inevitably, there was a prize

for the team with the most points [*I think we should reverse this next year. Ed.*], there was even a tie-breaker because two teams scored the same...

I missed an opportunity to score the tie-breaker on members of the team wearing Christmas jumpers (sorry folks, I'll be ready next time!).

And somewhere in between, there were pictures taken, food eaten and some alcohol may also have passed our lips (the evidence is below)!

*Jude New, Events Secretary*



*More overleaf...*

## B&L's Christmas dinner (cont.)



## Membership and money matters

Thank you to those members who have already renewed their membership of Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers.

I am using a new system this year. Generally, it seems to be working OK—but there are a few who have experienced problems (specifically when using a mobile phone to make the payment).

If you haven't renewed yet, please look for an email from me sent on 9

December titled "existing member renewal invitation..." I can resend so please let me know if you need it sent again.

If you've tried and have been unsuccessful – then please get in touch with me and together we'll resolve any payment issues.

### Renewals

Your renewal was due before end of December 2025. For info, the

membership rates are shown on the B&L website.

I shall be attending the monthly meeting on 21 January in Lewes – and can accept payment then.

I shall also be asking for donations (circa £3) towards our running costs—and will have a card reader with me.

*Graham Bubloz, Treasurer & Membership Secretary*

## Winter/spring events

Date	Event	Location	Leader
Wed 7 January	Bee Chat	Thatched Inn, Hassocks BN6 8DH	Mim/Debbie
Wed 21 Jan	From Swarms to Swimming Pools	Lewes	Simon Tuck
Wed 4 February	Bee Chat	Lewes (poss. Dorset)	Mim/Debbie
<b>Wed 18 February</b>	<b>B&amp;L AGM</b>	<b>Lewes</b>	
Wed 11 March 2026	Apitherapy & medicines	Lewes	Chris Park
Wed 15 April 2026	Oops! My bees have swarmed	Lewes	Martin Hann & Clare Densley

### Bee Chats

- 19:00 in a pub

### 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).

## National Bee Unit Inspectors

### Seasonal Bee Inspectors

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Helen Hadley  
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### B&L newsletter's award certificate



*We are grateful to the following for their support:*



**Lewes Town Council**



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

**Co-operative Membership  
Community Fund**

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 Hove: Adrien Parker  
 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.