

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

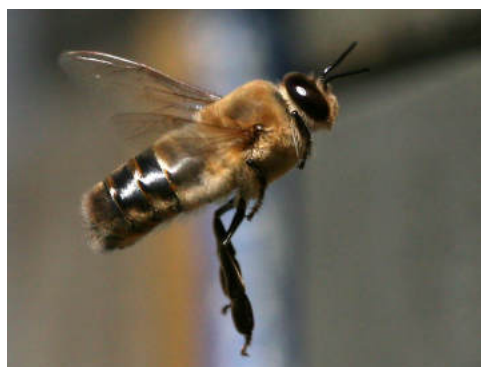
NEWSLETTER JUNE 2026

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- Events, names and faces

EDITORIAL



Inside, we chronicle the explosion that has come upon us as a consequence of the ever-changing weather and climactic patterns to which the bees react.

Like every beekeeper I've spoken to, the flow in May was stupendous—how much of it was the dreaded OSR is location-dependent of course—and the bees have built up as if was summer already.

Events

I recall how one prime minister who, when asked what he feared most, responded “events, dear boy, events”. Well, you’ve no need to fear Jude’s events calendar: there’s so much do—just check her events round-up column on page 5, as well as the calendar on this and the back page.

Warriors and bees

And finally, we’ve a thought-provoking feature from Jeff, who carefully outlines the parallels between our own beloved charges and the human warriors currently wreaking havoc across the globe. Not for the first time, nor will it be the last that honey bees have been held up as mirrors to human behaviour.

Manek Dubash, Editor

EVENTS

- Open apiary meetings
- Training
- Swarming

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.

June 2026 events

Date	Event	Location	Leader
Sat 30 May	Open hive: Demaree/Padgen splits	Barcombe	Ian
Sat 13 June	Open hive: swarming and starving	Rottingdean	Jeff
Sat 13 June	Open hive: swarming and starving	Grassroots	Jude
Sat 25 June	Open hive: honey production	Hove	Adrien
Sat 25 June	Open hive: honey production	Grassroots	Jude

Bee Chats start at 19.30. **Open meetings** start at 19.00 for 19.30.
You can find the full list of 2026 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

It's been a busy month for all of us, hasn't it? Early build-up, big honey crops as already extractions have taken place. And for me (excuse my indulgence), it's been extra-busy as my biggest colony—bulging with bees and four supers on—had to be moved due to super-defensive behaviour.

It became seriously unpleasant to inspect, bees stinging everywhere and following for 50 metres or more. The land owner was pressuring me to do something as, despite re-queening, people were being stung as furious foragers vented their displeasure. So one evening, Ian and I shifted the hive and supers to another apiary. Thank you, Ian, for your invaluable help and advice.

The main lesson for me, as far as the physical operation was concerned, was to develop a detailed operational plan beforehand. For example, in order to get the supers off, at least one needed to be cleared and removed to make the move manageable, so that involved a bit of box shifting. And using travel screens was essential, as we were into this warm spell at the end of May, when the risk of a big colony overheating is high.

Further gory details are available on request. Stamped addressed envelopes only, please.

At this point I'll just mention the other hive that fell over...

Yellow-legged Asian Hornet report



Rachel Ramaker
Asian Hornet Team
Co-ordinator

From the Defra Bee Health Policy Team:

In December 2025, Defra confirmed that the NBU will not be asked to carry out spring trapping for YLH in England in 2026. This decision was taken in response to the high number and geographic spread of later season nest finds during 2025.

At the BHAF meeting held on 5 March, a Fera-based PhD student, gave a presentation about the work she had done during her PhD on kinship analyses of YLH nests found and destroyed in England from 2016 to 2024. The results from these analyses suggested that there is a limited established population of YLH in England. It is likely that there will be further evidence of kinship relatedness from the analyses of nests destroyed in 2025. Nevertheless, Defra remains committed to taking action against YLH and have asked the NBU to take action to find and destroy nests later in the 2026 season.

With these findings and the number of samples involved, it has been difficult for the laboratory to complete analyses of YLH to provide information in a timely manner for the field to adapt during the live response to YLH. As a result, Fera will not be commissioned to carry out genetic analyses of YLHs found in England in 2026.

In England, previously the NBU followed up credible spring sightings and then arranged to collect the sample. However, as these samples will not be analysed, while

contact will still be made with the reporter, no sample recovery will be undertaken. That said, continue to report sightings so that we record where and how many hornets have been sighted to inform later season developments. We'll summarise these findings on BHAF and BeeBase.

The Welsh government has commissioned the NBU to carry out spring trapping in Wales and will follow the previously established process.

Later in the season when nests are more likely to be present, Defra have asked the NBU to follow up credible sightings to find and destroy nests.

We are very grateful for the actions that you take and support you provide in dealing with YLH. Best wishes,

Further guidance

Warwick Newson and Lucie Chaumeton, BBKA Trustees Chair and Vice Chair of YLAH Committee, added the following guidance: the public are no longer required to preserve all YLH caught and send them to NBU. Anyone may destroy a YLH, but you may want to try preserving it for educational purposes.

Stay safe when killing any YLH caught: place the sealed trap, free of any by-catch, in soapy water, or in a freezer. If transporting a trap place it in a zip lock bag or sealed container in transit, for extra personal safety and bio-security.

Seasonal tips for June



Honey bee on coneaster in spring

As ever, it's been a busy swarming month, one that's likely to continue for some weeks. And now I'm going to remind you of the possibility of another bad event: the June gap.

This is a period normally around June (surprise, surprise) when the last of the spring flowers (not just flowers but trees as well) have gone over and it's too early for the early summer trees and flowers to bloom.

The June gap is most often felt in rural areas dominated by intensive agriculture—like Sussex.

The plentiful hawthorn blooms of hedgerows, hedgerow trees and gluts of autumn sown oil seed rape are largely over by June but the summer wildflowers are not yet at their peak and the heather is still weeks away. Because of climate change we may not even get a gap this year, but the



The gap between oil seed rape and heather

weather is, as always, very changeable and the bees may be confined to the hive for some time. This implies that it may need feeding.

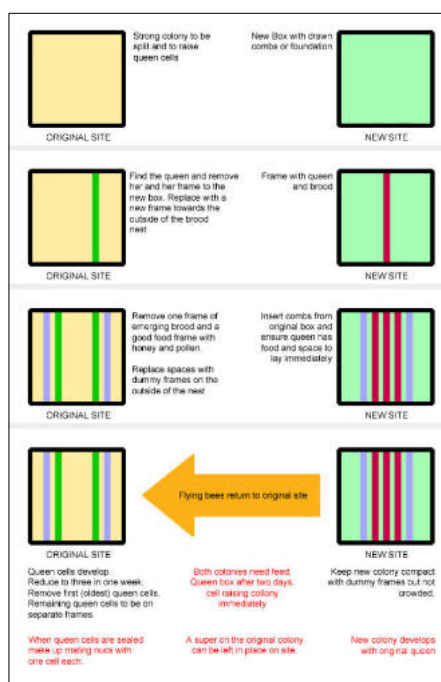
Remember, with the colony rapidly expanding, it can get through about 5kg of stores in a week, so count how much is in your hive/s. A brood frame filled on both sides weighs about 2.5kg. Check what percentage of each frame is covered by stores to calculate whether the colony will survive a prolonged period of confinement.

If in doubt, feed them. Use either commercial, invert sugar syrup or make your own. I make mine in a ratio of one litre of water to one kg of sugar. You don't have to heat it but it helps to dissolve the sugar. Don't feed the colony with supers on or you'll end up with syrup in your supers.

Colony splitting

You'll probably need to split your colonies at some point, either to make increase or to help suppress the swarming instinct.

Unless you have a source of mated or virgin queens, it will take at least three weeks before you see any sign of new brood being laid in the queenless hive. About four or five days after



A splitting plan

splitting the colony, knock out all but one or two of the queen cells, and then leave them alone. You will only end up trying to inspect a very defensive colony and that's no fun for any of us. However, you will still need to continue with weekly inspections to ensure that new queen cells have not developed in your unsplit colonies.

Once the new queen has hatched and is laying, you will have to find and mark her. If you're really keen on selling on your queens, you'll use the internationally recognised colour for the year, as seen here. Or if the eyes aren't what they were, use easily-seen colours like pink, yellow or white.

Finding the queen

On a warm, still day when the foragers are out working, open the hive. Picture what the queen looks like. Working smoothly, take out the first frame, if it has few bees on it, place on the ground near the entrance.

As you lift each frame from the hive, scan it in a zig-zag pattern from top to bottom and then around the sides.

Queens usually move away from the light, heading for the dark side, so you might see her as she goes over the top.

The queen has a very characteristic way of walking close to the comb and will also be trying, determinedly, to



A marked queen. Photo: Nigel Kermode

Seasonal tips for June (continued)



Marked queen bee with her court

reach the darker side, so look for a bee on the march. Look for the longer abdomen and the longer brown legs. If you're lucky you'll see a 'court' of bees around her—see above.

If you haven't found her on your second pass through the hive, your next step is to pair up the frames.

Put two pairs of frames in a nuc with a space between them. Space the remaining frames in the main hive with at least a frame's gap between each pair. We know the queen avoids the light, so remove a pair of frames and open them like a book. Do this with each pair until you find the queen.

The last resort is to sift the bees through a queen excluder. As the name implies, all but the queen (and drones) will pass through the excluder.



Nicely filled super frame.

Photo: David Evans (The Apiarist)

Next steps

You will need to put supers on your hive. The first will need to go on when the hive has about nine seams of bees in it. Shuffle the frames as they fill to get evenly drawn combs. The next super should go on (above or below the existing) when the first super is nearly full.

If you have hives near oilseed rape (OSR) then you will need to extract the honey before it sets like concrete. Do not wait until the honey is capped: that's too late. Do the shake test before it is capped: hold the frame upside down and shake vigorously. If nectar drips out, leave it for a few more days. If no nectar drips out, it's time to extract. And this year looks likely to be a good one.

Varroa

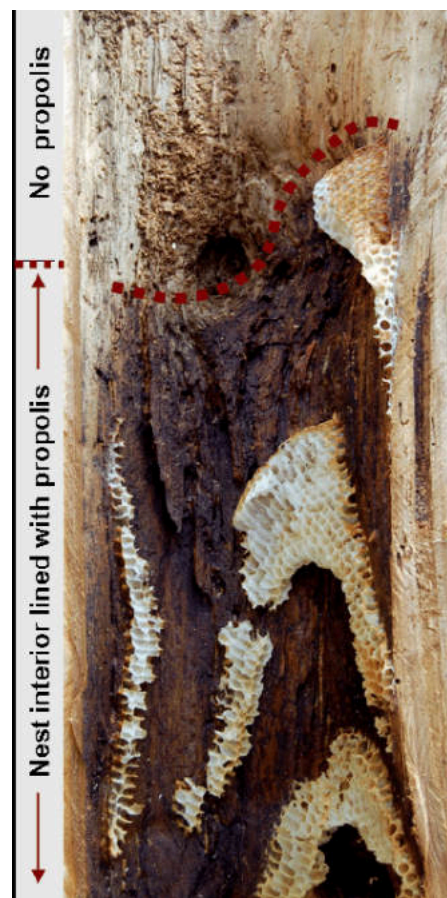
Continue to monitor the varroa mite count. An average of more than ten a day indicate that treatment is required urgently.

If you have honey supers on use a type of treatment that can be used when the supers are on. Formic Pro, which remains commercially available, unlike its predecessor MAQS, is not approved for use with supers on, despite its active agent, formic acid, being the same as MAQS. This, I would suspect, is a consequence of both the cost and the time taken to achieve approval for medicines. Otherwise treat with your preferred agent.

In the event you haven't been able to split your hive/s, always have a bait hive set up nearby; you never know,



Bees with deformed wing virus



A cross-section of a feral honey bee hive within a tree cavity found September 2009. The nest interior where comb is present is coated in a thin layer of propolis creating a "propolis envelope" around the colony. Photo: Michael D. Simone-Finstrom

you might even catch someone else's bees.

A quick recipe for bait hives is to make it smell like home—if you're a honey bee. Researchers have found that swarms of bees in the wild are much more likely to set up home in a tree cavity that has previously been used by bees than not.

So make it a reasonably sized hole: a National brood box is ideal. Put a ranky old frame in there, just one frame, as the scout bees from a swarm will measure the size of the cavity and, if they keep bumping into frames, they are more likely to reject it.

With luck you'll be the recipient of free bees.

The Veiled Beekeeper

Apiary reports

Grassroots

Honey Bee Health module candidates participated in a Bailey comb change operation at Grassroots in May.



The start

The first pictures are of the change being set up, with the brood and workers below the Bailey board at the beginning of May.

The queen was moved to a fresh box with new foundation and the bees on her frame given syrup to encourage drawing comb. They were placed on a Bailey board over the original brood box full of dark comb from 2025.

This arrangement allowed the nurse bees to come up to attend the brood on the queen's frame and any other



eggs and brood produced during the process.

The end

The bottom picture (right) shows the comb to be destroyed. The last hive picture shows the bees using the new open mesh floor and lower entrance this week (20 May).

The queen has built the colony in the new brood box out to five seams of bees since the start of May and all the brood that was in the bottom box has emerged and joined the new brood box.



The temperature in the apiary was 18°C.

Jude New, Apiary Manager

Events round-up

It's a busy time: a queen rearing course is underway at Hove, a Basic Assessment preparation course at Grassroots and Ian and Jeff will be opening to demonstrate supering, feeding if there is a June gap and preparation for clearing and extraction ready for July/August. There's a new chat group for members interested in joining the Basic Assessment preparation sessions online and in the apiary.

I am keen to give the apiaries a bit of

a break in July; it's a busy time for supering and extraction so we are demonstrating in June and asking members to volunteer to open their apiaries.

Open apiaries

I have asked members to volunteer

- to open their apiary
- conduct an inspection
- have a cup of tea and a bit of cake.

If each volunteer has two or three visitors, we can limit the spread of

disease.

The group I was working with on Module 3 Honey Bee Diseases, Pests & Poisoning, focused on cross-contamination and the beekeeper being the biggest vector of disease.

We will impress on the day that clean suits, boots and gloves must be worn so that volunteers see we are trying to minimise disease transmission.

...continued on page 7

Apiary reports (continued)

Hove



What a difference a week makes! The first queen rearing session on Saturday 16 May was cancelled because the weather was cold and overcast but the following Saturday was just right with temperatures easily in the mid 20s, blue skies and hardly a breeze. Unfortunately a few people had to drop out because of the date change but others stepped in to fill their places.

I planned to use a modified Ben Harden method of queen rearing, grafting day old larvae into artificial queen cups and placing them into a queenright hive. My chosen hive to graft from and to use to finish off the queen cells was stand 5 which is on a



brood and a half. This hive produced a terrific amount of honey last year and is on the way to doing the same this year, the bees are very gentle, calm on the comb and the queen heading the colony is marked green which means the colony hasn't attempted to swarm for the last two years.

I prepared the hive the day before by harvesting the top two supers which left a more manageable number of boxes. We started by removing the supers and placing them aside. We then checked that the colony were not making swarm preparations and placed the upper 1/2 brood box to one side. We then took two frames of open brood and a frame of pollen from the bottom deep brood box and placed them between two fat dummy boards in a new deep brood box. We then replaced the three frames that we had taken from the bottom brood box with drawn comb, placed the queen in the bottom brood box and added the queen excluder.



The brood box that we had prepared with the frames taken from the bottom brood box was now placed on top of the queen excluder and we were ready to start grafting. We used frames from the top (half) brood box to locate appropriately aged young larvae. Everybody who wanted to try their hand at grafting larvae had a go using a Chinese grafting tool and when grafting frame was fully loaded we added it into the centre of the brood box above the queen excluder. We then added the 1/2 brood box on top and finally replaced the supers.

It's now a waiting game to see if we have been successful. On day 11 (next Saturday) we will remove any capped queen cells and place them in an incubator and the hive will be returned to its normal configuration. The virgin queens should emerge on Thursday 4 June.

Adrien Parker, Apiary Manager
Photos: Heidi Burgess

Rottingdean



Peacock butterfly in the apiary

What a month! No gym, no time, no energy... just bees!

Suddenly, I have no space in my

garden apiary (seven colonies) and the Rottingdean Apiary in the wood is expanding too, though quite slowly. The temperature up there is a clear two to three degrees cooler than in the village and that may explain something.

We have hosted two open apiary meetings since the last newsletter - one on disease inspections and the last on the vertical split method. It was great to see Valerie, Jill, Ivana, Sacha

and Michele.

I've got two swarms via Ian/B&L, one of which has now already created quite a lot of brood, the other, from down the valley by the pumping station, is still developing. While I was waiting for the bees to march in, two Romanian tourists arrived to take over the holiday caravan. They were much interested in the bees and were really knowledgeable.

Apiary reports (continued)

Bees and culture

Like so many Eastern Europeans that I



Wax moth cocoons

meet, they were relaxed and fine with bees. My neighbours on both sides of the house had builders two years ago—the one with Brit builders complained that her builders had downed tools because they were worried about the bees. On the other side, the Polish builders, downed tools too...to ask if they could help!

Swarms galore

This week, my local contacts led me to two more swarms. One is developing, so its too early to say how they'll turn out. The other was from an abandoned hive. It was so riven with moth (see pic) that I had difficulty identifying the problem. The poor bees were forced back into the brood box with few stores. I destroyed the frames and rehoused the bees—in theory they should have a productive queen so I hope when they draw the foundation, I



Varroa on drone brood

should see brood. They made dark brown honey which was delicious.

Although I've got 16 frames of ripe honey, most colonies are still a way off producing anything useful for beekeepers.

Jeff Rodrigues, Apiary Manager

Events round-up (cont. from p5)

Adrien has said that visitors to Rushfields Garden Centre will be able to use their toilets, and cafe, and Ross said he could open his apiary at Woods Mill.

Divisional honey extraction

Concerns about contamination and

hygiene breaches last year are the reasons for not providing a group extraction day this year. Despite meticulous planning, the day became chaotic at times, and some of the hygiene plans were compromised.

A food hygiene session online could be offered for our members who are

planning to extract at home and used to advertise the new, food-safe manual extractors we can lend at £5.00 per day of hire (£40 returnable deposit). To be returned cleaner than it was when borrowed!

Jude New, Events Secretary

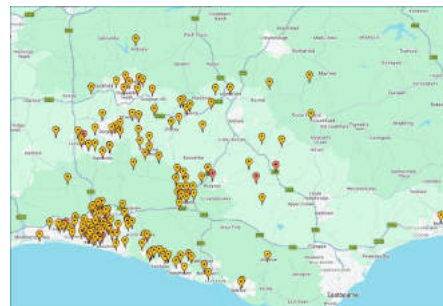
Update: membership and treasury

We gained a little income from the Sussex BKA Bee Market (see below) and we have £3,723.49 in the bank. That's about the same as 12 months ago, so we are just about keeping our head above water. I will meet Jude to understand our financial commitment for the next 12 months, to budget

accordingly, and to investigate course charges etc.

Membership: 21 people have joined us since January.

*Graham Bubloz,
Membership Secretary & Treasurer*



A rough idea of membership locations (the Bexhill flag is pest controller David Guy).

Year	Income	Outgoings	Profit	Comments
2025	£498.25	£276.64	£221.61	Sale of teas/coffees and shop-bought cakes
2026	£97.50	£3.00	£94.50	Sale of books

Bee Market aftermath



The Sussex BKA on 9 May was a reasonable success, all things considered. But it won't be the same next year.

What happened at the BM?

This year's event raised cash for the county organisation, the auction was well stocked, and footfall was OK.

At the recent Sussex BKA committee meeting, chairman Simon Tuck delivered a detailed analysis of the event's attendance figures, showing that 259 people passed the front desk, 140 of whom were Sussex beekeepers. And 34 of them were from B&L, which is 28% of our membership and the largest proportion compared to other divisions.

Simon's figures showed 104 attendees were members of the public and the remaining 15 were children.

But the bulk of the document was a breakdown of the feedback from attendees—check out the document below.

Feedback results

Of the beekeeper members who didn't attend, many said that May was too late in the year, so the event was competing with all the seasonal beekeeping and gardening jobs.

Beekeepers—those who came

along—said they most valued the expert talks and lectures; this year Lynne Ingram (Honey Authenticity Network) spoke about the problems with honey, while Malcolm Wilkie (High Weald BKA) gave a talk aimed at the general public on how to take up beekeeping.

There's a social element too, as beekeepers said they valued both the chance to meet others and beekeeping-specific stalls.

In summary, beekeepers wanted a more convention-style event with greater focus on beekeeping-related trade stalls, as there were quite a few peripheral stalls. Turns out those didn't do as well perhaps as they had hoped and may be unlikely to return next year.

There was feedback too about the auction, with people wanting a smaller, shorter auction, preferably without bees—as in, nucs for sale—being present. Not because of the bees themselves, but during the BM one nuc died from overheating, so that was a shock. Basically, the auction was a lengthy event with much of the kit up for sale low value so a more curated selection with a catalogue was requested.

Our cakes were missed

Perhaps encouraging, *post-facto*, for those previously involved in our cake stall at the BM, was the sadness expressed by many attendees at the

lack of home-made cakes.

You may be aware that traditionally B&L had until the event last year provided such cakes and we made a good profit out of it too. However, due to concerns relating to product liability insurance, which B&L cannot obtain as we're not a commercial entity, we were forced to stop doing so.

2027: Bee Market no more?

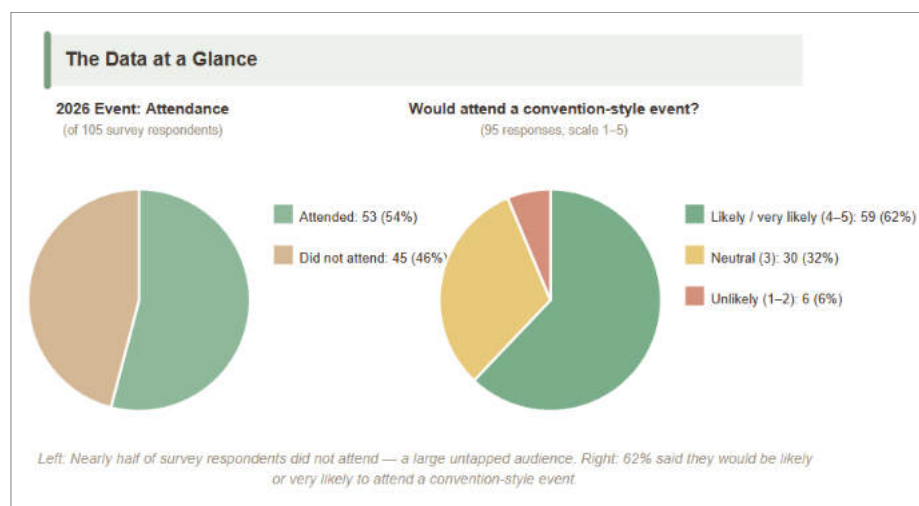
Following Simon's delivery of his breakdown, there was much discussion about where to take the Bee Market.

There is no need to take definitive decisions at this stage, but most agreed that the name 'Bee Market' needed to change—perhaps to something like 'Festival of Bees' in order to broaden its focus.

Other ideas included making it free to enter but charging an entry fee to lectures, and not bringing bees for sale to the auction but instead allowing buyers to pick them up directly from the seller.

I'll provide an update in due course, closer to the event, but it seems fairly certain that the Bee Market as we've known is set to change—and that it will be earlier in the year so as not to clash with our busy time.

Manek Dubash



Warriors borrow from bees



Honey bee drone. Photo: Waugsberg

I guess nobody can escape seeing, hearing, reading and getting upset about the awful geo-political situations in Northern Europe and the Middle East. But it is interesting how much language and concepts that we associate with bees is being actively used in some new forms of warfare.

Words

‘Drone’ is an obvious example but it is not entirely a convincing one because the word has at least two meanings: a continuous low pitch musical note (used a lot in classical Indian and music and in the uilleann pipe); a male bee; and now in all our papers, an unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV).

‘Swarming’ sounds pretty close to our beekeeper world. In the last two years, large numbers of UAVs have been launched simultaneously and this capability is a game-changer. The operator-to-drone ratio was until very recently one-to-one, and Ukrainian operators became key kill targets for Russians. But being able to swarm drones makes it one-to-many.



Ukrainian Poseidon UAV

Command and control

But how can swarms be controlled if one operator has launched say 100 drones?

The answer is that you need distributed intelligence to enable autonomous decision-making, just as bee swarms have. The one-to-one ratio meant that Ukrainian drones were very vulnerable to signal-jamming plus signal-tracking to enable the enemy to potentially identify the operator’s location.

But the new swarms do not have a connection back to the operator. The operator is responsible for setting the tactical objective and the swarm drones, post launch, have the responsibility to execute kill decisions.

Individuals in the swarm communicate with each other, including sharing visual and positional data, and can simultaneously initiate a swarming attack and hopefully overwhelm the enemy defences.

Swarms with chips

Up-to-date AI chips provide each UAV with the ability to visually identify objects and geographical features and to form a network with the other individuals in the swarm, without a cloud connection and without any signal back to/from the operator. The software platform is called HiveMind (US technology). The system exists in both interceptor UAVs (defensive) and attack UAVs.

The one difference with bee swarms is that decision-making is very rapid. Human operators cannot decide fast enough in the engagement time-window, given the numbers in the swarm. In UAV swarms, the humans are in control rather than in command. Tactical decisions are made autonomously without a cloud connection, so Russians can’t jam the swarm, whereas bee swarms have a long and ultra-democratic process for agreeing a target nest site.

Other advanced swarm behaviours that remind us of bees, such as collective decision-making, adaptive flying and self-healing are now being



Ukrainian beekeeper.
Photo: Greater Good Charity

developed.

And drones—both bee and UAV—are dispensable in a way! The cost asymmetry is amazing. A drone costing less than \$5,000 can bring down a hugely expensive enemy attack machine costing several millions of dollars; a Patriot missile costs over \$10m.

Of course, the Russians are good at learning fast too. Russia adapted the Iranian Shahed drones (\$35k to \$50k each) to fly higher to evade Ukrainian defensive drones. But then Ukraine adapted theirs to fly at 4-5km (6,000ft). Ukraine has found [AI-enabling Nvidia chipsets](#) in wreckage of Shaheds), as well as thermal-vision modules capable of locking onto targets at night...

Beekeepers unite!

Oh, and Ukrainians are highly skilled beekeepers and recognised as world leaders in beekeeping, the largest producer of honey in Europe and fifth in the world and the highest number per capita of beekeepers per population.

Jeff Rodrigues



Shahed drone. Photo: Shutterstock

Summer events

Sat 30 May	Open hive: Demaree/Padgen splits	Barcombe	Ian
Sat 13 June	Open hive: swarming and starving	Rottingdean	Jeff
Sat 13 June	Open hive: swarming and starving	Grassroots	Jude
Sat 25 June	Open hive: honey production	Hove	Adrien
Sat 25 June	Open hive: honey production	Grassroots	Jude

Bee Chats

- 19:30 in a pub: next is at 1930, Wednesday 3 June at The Dorset, Lewes

Winter meetings in Lewes

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

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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