



# The Apiarist

...High Weald Beekeepers' Newsletter

## Chairman's Chatter

By Malcolm Wilkie

2024 has been challenging for all of us who keep bees. The winter of 2023-24 was extremely wet and I for one ended up with slugs inside my hives ; this was a first for me.

My own hives were slow to build up and there was no Spring honey. I did wonder at one point whether there would be any honey at all this year. However the bees worked hard and the Summer crop was a good one.

Temperatures have been warmer than average and colonies are large. I am nervous about varroa and my treatments are going on late. Mea culpa.

The association has run sessions nearly every month to help members. The swarm session was well attended and so was the session on treatments against varroa. A lot of you got involved with the mini safaris taking place in June and new members in particular seemed to benefit.

The summer barbecue was enjoyed by all; I loved the lake and wildflowers



at Chris Blandford's garden. A big thank you to Sandy Infield for organising the food and to her husband for doing all the cooking. This

must be the best garden of any of our members and a lovely backdrop to a lovely and enjoyable meal.

We had an excellent session building hornet traps in February and much debate about what is needed. In the end it was only myself who has come under attack from Asian hornets ( I live and keep my bees in St Leonards ) and our wonderful bee inspectorate team turned up within 24 hours of my reported sighting and within three days the nest had been found. Mercifully that nest was unable to do any real damage to my bees but i am aware things could have been very different and count myself lucky. I will definitely be putting out traps in the Spring to catch and kill Asian

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For full calendar & details see <https://hwbka.info/event/>

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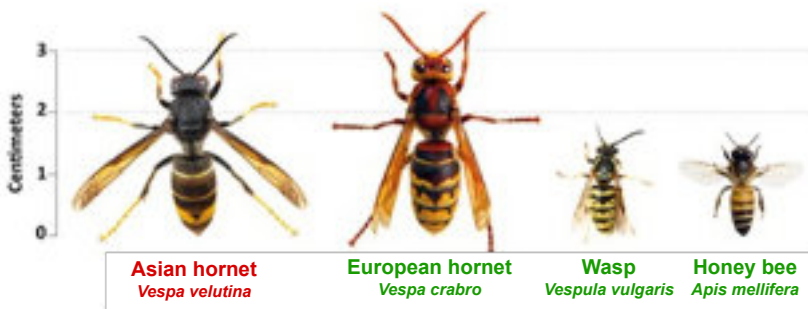
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hornet queens especially as our garden is full of Spring flowering camellias.

Many of you are actively involved but there are still many members on the periphery who we would all like to see at events more often. A reminder to them that there is an events diary on the website where one can look up

*continues on the next page. . .*

## Think you've seen an Asian hornet? Report it!



Report through the Asian hornet Watch app or [www.bit.ly/asianhornetreport](http://www.bit.ly/asianhornetreport)

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upcoming sessions and events. Topical tips can be found there too and past copies of our Apiarist magazine: I know it's easy to get information from YouTube but the information here is what works for those of us in the association with years of experience. There is a WhatsApp discussion group (ask Peter Halford to add your mobile number).

Peter Halford's email is [the.hwbka+member-ship@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+member-ship@gmail.com). I myself rely on it greatly as it allows me to see what is happening in other people's apiaries at any particular time of year. I can then take action if necessary on my own bees. I know at swarming time people can find this useful because I know if I send out a message on the group more often than not 10 people will have read it within 5 minutes. That discussion group is an incredible resource so sign up.

In November we will have our honey show again. It's on November 24th. Please come and enter a jar or two of your honey. The size of the jar does not matter. At our own honey show moulded and rolled candles can be entered and please remember that there is a wax workshop on Saturday November 9th so that you can make candles to be entered at our show on the 24th. The AGM is held at the same time but as I am chair it will be brief. This is an afternoon for us all to showcase the work of our bees and come together as a group and learn from each other, which I believe will be crucial in the next few years as the Asian hornet begins to get a foothold in the South East.

I look forward to seeing you either at the National honey Show at the end of October at the Sandown Park Racecourse in Surrey or on Sunday November 24th at our own honey show in the Five Ashes Village Hall. 🐝

## Book review

By Paul Lindström

*Honeybees, a natural and a less natural history* by Jacques van Alphen.

Publisher: Northern Bee Books, 2024

ISBN:

978-1-914934-83-4

Softback, 149 pages

Cost: £22

Jacques van Alphen is a biologist in the field of evolutionary ecology. He studied the behaviour and evolution parasitoid wasps, speciation in tropical fish and toads, the conservation of tigers and the role of natural selection in the evolution of resistance in Varroa mites. He was Professor at University of Leiden, The Netherlands and held an EU Chair of excellence at the University of Rennes in France. He is a fellow of the Naturalis Biodiversity Centre in Leiden. He lives part of the year in the north of France where he keeps black honey bees.

There are 26 chapters in the book, which sounds like a lot, but they are all fairly short and written in an accessible way. The style of writing reminds me of that of Tom Seeley – even though a scientist he manages to write so that laymen can follow and enjoy the narrative. After each chapter there are references to other books and end reports on the topic for those who want to dig even deeper.

In chapter one van Alphen briefly walks us through the history of bees and of humanity, where the bees probably existed earlier than humans, at least 66 million years ago. Other chapters explain key functions and behaviour of the honey bee and in chapter 16 we learn about the arrival of Varroa mites while in chapter 20 we learn about the Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*).

In 21 he describes the ways honey bees "self medicate", by collecting different types of honey and pollen which functions as a defence against pathogens, parasites and diseases.



And of course the collection of propolis. He criticises beekeepers who try and breed bees that don't collect and use much propolis, since the propolis has many important features in the hive.

In chapter 22 he criticises brother Adams for thinking that all Black bees were extinct and

had to be replaced by hybrid honeybees known as Buckfast bees. He ends the chapter by saying "it is difficult to understand why beekeeping in Britain and elsewhere in Europe is still organised in the same way as it was in Brother Adam's day". And it is true that the Buckfast bees are still quite popular, while it's questionable that this hybrid honey bee has any advantages to locally bred bees that have adapted to the local environment. Already in the introduction van Alphen's love for the native Black bee, *Apis mellifera*, is apparent and he would like to see that the Black bees could be re-introduced in greater numbers.

In the last four chapters van Alphen tackles controversial subjects like whether honeybees pose a threat to solitary bees and bumblebees. He points to other threats, like modern ways of farming and the lack of wild flower meadows, but admits that placing many honey bee hives in an area with limited resources might compete with local solitary bees and bumblebees. In chapter 24 he talks about the challenges in trying to create sanctuaries to re-create the pure Black bees, not very easy to achieve. In chapter 25 van Alphen points to Tom Seeley's 21 point list of how the life of "wild" honeybees differs from managed honeybees, by Seeley called "Darwinian beekeeping". It's clear that van Alphen supports Seeley's ideas to make beekeeping more "natural", and van Alphen also urges us to help restore the native Black bee population, and describes why that is a good way forward. I would strongly recommend you to read this book. 🐝



# Weald in the Field – a picture gallery

*By Paul Lindström*

HWBKA participated in the “Weald in the Field” event in August by having a stall there. We had the observation hive on display, posters describing the threat from the Asian hornets and we sold honey produced in our apairy as well as by some of our members.

The stall was manned by Di Newham, Deborah Park, Peter Coxon, Matt Weeks and myself.

We were lucky with the weather and lots of people attended the event in the Luxford Field in the centre of Uckfield.

The other stalls offered a wide range of produce as well as offered different kind of food and drinks. And there were music, in fact several really good bands. All in all an enjoyable day.

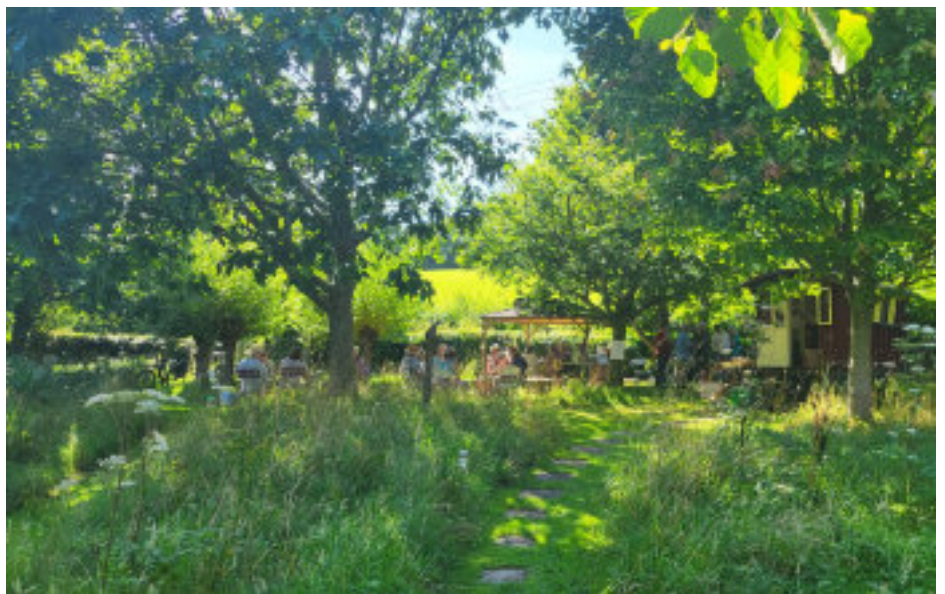




# HWBKA Summer BBQ – a picture gallery

*By Paul Lindström. Images by Carlton Waghorn*

The HWBKA Summer barbecue was hosted by Chris Blandford in his beautifully landscaped garden. Sandy Infield organised it and her husband Mark operated the grill. A lovely afternoon.





# How I improved my beekeeping experience

By Caroline Barbour

Until this year my beekeeping experience has not been entirely positive. It started in earnest when I collected my first large swarm



from the middle of a holly hedge with lots of nettles around it. I was thrilled with my success, having got the queen on the second attempt while using my newly made skep. At last, I was a beekeeper. A few weeks later the colony swarmed, so after catching the swarm I now had two colonies.

Last year the two colonies survived the winter. The original colony swarmed at least twice that year. Then the swarms swarmed. Every time a new Queen started laying the bees would swarm again. Although I got pretty good at catching swarms, it was a little disheartening. I was determined that this year was going to be much better.

This year the bees had a very tricky start due to the weather, but I had two strong colonies and one long suffering husband. I attended the swarm control day determined to become a good beekeeper. I managed eventually to find and mark the queens. You guessed it, both colonies swarmed in spite of my best efforts, and then in spite of being queenright one of them became very aggressive. By now I was thinking that perhaps this lark wasn't for me. It was lots of effort, lots of stress, and not very rewarding. I clearly wasn't succeeding.

However, this is how my experience changed. I won a nucleus of Lesley and Malcolm's bees in a raffle. I collected the bees from Malcolm on 1 July this year (2024) and hived them that evening. The queen was just sitting on her throne in the middle of the first frame that I moved into the hive, so that was a good start. I had seen the queen with no difficulty at all.

What a revelation these lovely, calm and gentle bees have been. They quickly drew out all the new foundation on the frames in the 14x12 brood box. If I was able to photograph with gloves on, I could show you the queen's perfect laying pattern. Within



*Caroline dealing with one of the many swarms she experienced.*



a month they had half filled a super with capped honey and are a joy to handle.

Now I need to get Varroa treatment right and make sure I get them through the winter, because next year I will be a better beekeeper!

So perhaps after all, I will make a beekeeper one day. Thank you, Malcolm and Lesley. 🐝



# DIY – flexible and yet solid hive stands

By Paul Lindström

This summer I had problems with ants and had to find a solution. One challenge I have in our apiary is that the ground in the paddock where the hives are is not flat but falls away at a considerable angle.

My old hive stands was made of fence posts hammered into the ground and of different heights to adjust for the uneven ground. This has worked fine until the ants found their way into the hives. It was clear that I needed to put the legs of the hive stands in tins filled with some kind of repellent. But I couldn't do that with the old hive legs, so thought about a possible solution. As it happens I have access to old scaffolding poles, but had no coupling to join them together. It turned out that couplings weren't that expensive, about £1.40 each. So I calculated how many I needed (8 per stand) and while waiting for the delivery I started to cut the old scaffolding poles to size, about 1.8m long to hold two bee hives. I cut the four legs to 45 cm, while the two cross bars was cut to 60 cm. I set the distance between the two long poles so that I can hang a dummy board or frame temporarily during inspections.

Thanks to the couplings I could adjust the height and so level the poles to be plumb, and quickly had all the stands changed. I plan to put engine oil in the cans at the feet to repel the ants – I don't think the ants like to swim through engine oil to get to the hives. Time will tell if my method works. But the stands are robust and easy to adjust to compensate for uneven ground.



*My new hive stands in place, easy to move and adjust to uneven ground.*



*The couplings were relatively cheap, about £1.40 each.*



*A tin half filled with engine oil should stop the ants (I hope).*



*The distance between the two long bars makes it possible to hang a frame temporarily during an inspection.*

## Summary of the latest HWBKA committee meeting

The HWBKA committee met on 10 July 2024.

Paul Lindström was appointed Assistant Apiary Manager at our apiary at Horsted Green park.

The old apiary at "Slab Castle" needs to be emptied latest 25 September. Ask for volunteers to help.

The association will cover the cost of the hall hire for our Christmas

Dinner to maintain the ticket price to what it was in 2023.

Our participation at the "Mini Crowfest" in Crowborough had to be cancelled due to too few volunteers.

Our web site has been moved to a new hosting company. Note to be sent out to members that the new URL is now <https://hwbka.info/>

**The next HWBKA Committee meeting will be on 16 October** – please submit

issues to discuss to our Honorary Secretary Holly Caetano Alves de Castro on email


[the.hwbka+secretary@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+secretary@gmail.com)



## Dates for your calendar

24<sup>th</sup>, 25<sup>th</sup> & 26<sup>th</sup> October  
**National Honey Show**  
Venue: Sandown Park

Studio, Fairwarp.  
Please express interest on the HWBK  
Events page

*More events might be listed [on our web site](#) – check it regularly for the latest updates.* 

Wednesday October 30<sup>th</sup> @ 7.30pm  
**Bee Banter**  
Venue: Function room, Rose & Crown  
Pub, Mayfield.

Sunday November 24<sup>th</sup> @  
1pm-5.30pm  
**AGM and Honeysow**  
Venue: Five Ashes Village Hall.

Saturday November 9<sup>th</sup> @ 10am-1pm  
**Session 10 – Wax workshop**  
Venue: Sandy Infields Black Shed

Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December @ 7pm  
**HWBK Christmas meal buffet**  
Venue: Mayfield Cricket Club. See ad!

## Rent a honey extractor from HWBKA



*The newer SAF Natura  
Tangential 4-frame extractor*

The association has three extractors available for rent. One newer SAF NATURA tangential 4-frames extractor, one older tangential 3/6-frames extractor (pictured right). We also have a smaller 3-frames tangential, kindly donated by Don Bastick.

You can rent them two days at a time. The newer 4-frame tangential cost £10 for two days (and a £20 deposit)

The older 6- and 3-frames tangential extractors cost £5 for two days (and a £15 deposit).

Included in the rent is a honey bucket, a sieve and an uncapping fork, if required + instructions for use.

Note that the deposit will be forfeit if returned late, damaged or dirty. Severe damage/repairs will be charged at cost.

One extractor is stored by Paul Lindström in Southover (outside Burwash).

The older 6-frames tangential and the 4-frame SAF Natura are stored by Lynne Curtis at Lynne's Organic Farm (just outside Crowborough).

All bookings and inquiries through Paul, see contact info below.

For info, availability and booking call either 01435-88 35 65 (preferred). Or call or text mobile 07833-088 766.

Or email: [the.hwbka+apiarist@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+apiarist@gmail.com) • Address: The Clock Tower, Southover, Spring Lane, Burwash, TN19 7JB



*The older tangential 6-frame  
extractor*



## Borrow a book from the HWBKA library

HWBKA has a selection of books that members can borrow at no cost. Look at the list on the HWBKA web site at <https://hwbka.info/education/hwbka-library/>

Our library is held by Helen Chivers – please email her at [the.hwbka+lecturecoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+lecturecoordinator@gmail.com) if you would like to borrow one or more books

## HWBKA Committee 2023-2024

President: Keith Obbard ([the.hwbka+president@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+president@gmail.com))

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Apiary Manager (Slab Castle): Keith Obbard

Apiary Manager (Horsted): Peter Coxon

Assistant Apiary Manager Roxanne Gould ([hwbkaapiaryassistant@outlook.com](mailto:hwbkaapiaryassistant@outlook.com))

Events Secretary: Sandy Infield ([the.hwbka+events@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+events@gmail.com))

Membership Secretary: Peter Halford ([the.hwbka+membership@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+membership@gmail.com))

Training & Education Manager: Malcolm Wilkie ([the.hwbka+training@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+training@gmail.com))

AHAT Coordinator: Peter Coxon ([the.hwbka+ahat@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+ahat@gmail.com))

Lecture Coordinator: Helen Chivers ([the.hwbka+lecturecoordinator@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+lecturecoordinator@gmail.com))

Acting web master: Peter Coxon ([the.hwbka+webmaster@gmail.com](mailto:the.hwbka+webmaster@gmail.com))

Committee member: Mark Wilcox

### **Other useful contacts – National Bee Unit inspectors:**

Local Bee Inspector: Daniel Morgan (Mobile: 07500 95 43 90, email [daniel.morgan@apha.gov.uk](mailto:daniel.morgan@apha.gov.uk))

For more Bee Inspectors see the National Bee Unit [web site](#).



***The High Weald Beekeepers  
Association's  
Christmas meal and a bit of a Do...  
Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> December***

***At The Mayfield Cricket Club  
7pm – midnight***

***£33/person for a sumptuous four course meal  
and rather a lot of fun!***

***Please contact Sandy Infield to book your ticket***

***[sandyinfield@gmail.com](mailto:sandyinfield@gmail.com)***

***Bring your own booze***