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January 2025

The Apiarist

. . .High Weald Beekeepers' Newsletter

Chairman's Chatter

By Malcolm Wilkie

It was good to see so many familiar faces at our Honey Show and a good number of entries. I myself was particularly pleased by the standard of the entries in the novice section. Such a very high standard from all entrants was extremely gratifying and an indication of improving skills among members who are now regularly getting a crop of honey from their bees. Well done all of you who participated.

Next year we hope to tweak a little the honey show and streamline the prize giving. Watch out for announcements in September.

In 2025 we will have a full beginners course again. This is the very best way to learn if you can actually commit the time to do all sessions. If you know of anyone who wants to learn, get them to email Peter Halford.

As usual there will be sessions for members. I myself hope to be able to do one on requeening an aggressive colony and I hope another experienced member will lead a session on swarm control without having to find the Queen and without making increase.

I am also hoping we may be able to look at the pollens in our honeys using a centrifuge. Look out for any sessions offered and sign up quickly if

you want to try and find out what it is that your bees are collecting .

There is a lot out there for members to access so keep yourself abreast by consulting the events page and joining in the sessions offered.

Anyone seriously wishing to improve their skills can also join in the zoom sessions run by Simon Tuck on honeybee behaviour. He's well on his way to becoming a master beekeeper so anyone who joins in will learn loads. These start in January so there is still time to sign up.

Good luck with your bees. I've trickled OA on mine and I've also been adding fondant. Some of my colonies are still very large. Fingers crossed that that will give me a good Spring crop. Lesley and I have just read in the BBKA magazine that 96% of supermarket honeys tested were not authentic honeys. Presumably something else had been added. So please bear in mind that when selling your own honey this is a premium product. Well done to everyone on what the have achieved. And finally thanks to all the committee members who give up their time to make the association work.

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

The Apiarist is a quarterly newsletter produced for members of the High Weald Beekeepers' Association.

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HWBKA AGM and Honeyshow 24 November 2024

By Paul Lindström

The AGM was fairly well attended and as usual it was followed by The Honey Show.

Our president Keith Obbard opened the meeting and reminded the attendees that the proceeds from the raffle later would go to the help fund the research at LASI, The Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects, University of Sussex.

Our Chairman Malcolm Wilkie then made his report from this year, mentioning among other things the training and our lectures and special sessions/workshops. Only three beginners finished the course this year. In 2025 we will probably cooperate with Brighton & Lewes BKA with the Beginner's Course. We will definitely continue with Bee Safaris in June.

It was planned to create sub-committee to judge if we still want to have our own club house, but this never happened due to lack of volunteers. If any member wants to be added to such a group please contact the chairman or our new secretary (see further down for the new committee structure. Email addresses can be found on the last page).

Asian hornets will continue to be a big challenge, so prepare to set up AH queen traps early in the Spring.

The membership numbers continue to drop somewhat and this might at some point be a concern for us. We are now 198 members, down from 218 last year.

Roxanne Gould has continued to take on more modules in the BBKA series and passed BBKA Module 5 "Honeybee Biology" and also passed the Basic Certificate with Credit. Lorraine Patel passed the "Bee Health" module. Carlton Waghorn passed the Basic Certificate and Mark Wilcox also passed the Module 5 with Distinction. A big thank you to Lorraine Patel who has trained and supported several of the candidates.

If you are interested in taking a BBKA exam, contact Peter Halford at the.hwbka+exams@gmail.com.

Our President Keith Obbard opened the AGM and encouraged the attendees to buy raffle tickets since the proceeds will go to research projects at LASI – The Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects at University of Sussex.

The closing balance for the association is £24,730.36, almost the same as last year. Most of the money is held as a fund for a possible future club house and apiary.

Most of the sitting committee members were re-elected, but we had to accept that Holly Caetano Alves de Castro needed to leave the committee for family reasons. The new committee member is Simon Bishop who will take on the role of Honorary Secretary. A big thanks to Holly for excellent work done! See last page for the structure of the new HWBKA committee.

The raffle at the Honey Show (see pictures next page) brought in £257.50, which will go to LASI from HWBKA to support their research.

Chairman Wilkie went through what we have done at HWBKA this year and presented his ideas for how we manage the Beginner's Course in 2025.

HWBKA Honeyshow

By Paul Lindström

Pictures here of the winners in the Honeyshow, and some won prizes in several different categories.

Roxanne Gould arranged the raffle with the help of Phil Edwards. A big thank you to them and also to the judges Jo and Rob Gore, Jonathan Coote and Keith Obbard. Also a big thanks to Helen Chivers who kept track of the entries to the honeyshow and the winners. Not listed with pictures are winners Grace Walasek and Paul Lindström.

Sandy Infield

Lesley Francis

Helen Chivers

Helen Hadley

Phil Edwards

Malcolm Wilkie

Roxanne Gould

Robert Stovell

Maurice McGowan

Vanessa Jones

Jo Crawford

Sarah Cullen

Fiona Henniker

Stephen Stordy

Roxanne and Carlton with their BBKA Diplomas for the Basic Certificate.

Roxanne and Mark with their BBKA Diplomas for Module 5 – Honeybee Biology.

Maurice McGowan was awarded the Lynn Moore Memorial cup for outstanding contribution to the association this year.

Helen Hadley was awarded the Vera Beqvar cup as overall winner.

A 2024 newbie reports

By Isabel Lloyd

For years I was a mental beekeeper: someone who kept bees, but only in their head. I had a shelf full of bee books, a subscription to the BBKA magazine and a couple of (donated) empty hives sitting in a damp corner of our high, windy patch of the Weald – but no actual colonies, and no real idea of how to start what TV programmes would call my "beekeeping journey". Then a friend of a friend told me about High Weald BKA's beginners' course. My address was actually (whisper it) just over the border in Hastings & Rother territory but, he said, "High Weald are a nice bunch, I don't think they'll mind." So in autumn 2023 I joined HWBKA, and the following February paid £71.50 to sign up for the introductory sessions of the course. My "journey" had begun; here, for what it's worth, is how it went.

Shortly after signing up, I was sent the beginners' book, a sturdy folder with content all produced by HWBKA, covering the basics of, among other things, bee development and behaviour, swarm control, pests and diseases, and honey processing. Photography was full colour, and compared to several other books I've read on beekeeping, all the information was clear, accessible and easy to absorb. I was also emailed details of various teaching sessions that would be held between February and November, and invited to join that year's beginners WhatsApp group, administered by Rob Gore, Peter Halford and Peter Coxon.

I should note here that 2024 was an experimental year for HWBKA's training arm, as for the first time it allowed beginners to learn alongside more experienced members. The newbies had two sessions to ourselves, and were then encouraged to join in as many of the other sessions as possible. The plan for 2025, as I understand it, is to have four beginner-only sessions early in the year, including one where students go through an actual hive; those who are minded to continue with the hobby after that can then pay an extra fee to attend more advanced, hands-on training sessions later in the season.

Anyway, back to 2024. Our first lesson, a basic introduction to bee-keeping, was held in February at Five Ashes village hall, where Malcolm and (if memory serves me) Peter Coxon talked us through what to expect from the bee-keeping year ahead. They gave us a tour of the components that make up National and WBC hives, showed us the various different kinds of protective clothing options, let us have a go at making our own Asian hornet traps, and finished off with the opportunity to taste different honeys from members' hives.

Robust and adjustable hive stands.

At this point my intention was to complete the whole course before buying a nuc the following spring, but Malcolm encouraged me to dive straight in, saying "the best way to learn beekeeping is to kill some bees". Encouraged – sort of – by this, and the fact that nearly all the other beginners on the course seemed either already to own colonies or have nucs on order, I asked Malcolm to put me in touch with Helen Hadley, who he said would soon have plenty of good-sized nucs ready for sale.

A cold, wet start to spring meant April was almost over before my bees were ready to collect, but one warmish Sunday I was finally able to drive to Helen's to get my box. I arrived in early evening; Helen, fully suited up in the low golden light, was busy on her driveway putting finishing touches to the tape that would (I hoped) hold the poly nuc together during the drive. She helped me load it into the car, then, full of excitement and anticipation, I took my girls home

Earlier in the year I'd built a nice solid new stand (pictured), big enough for two hives and sited, following Malcolm's advice, in a sunnier position than my original spot. This was where, the next day and with help from HWBKA member Mark who very kindly came over to help, I hived them into a National brood and a half, all filled with new frames and foundation. The ladies seemed very relaxed, we spotted the queen with her red dot, added a rapid feeder with some thin syrup, and Mark showed me how the frames had a good strong brood pattern in their centre, with plenty of pollen round the edges. We also saw five or six queen cups. Hmm.

Four days later, on 4 May, I went back to remove the feeder. Several frames had now been drawn and filled, the queen was still there – and so was a queen cell. With what looked like a 3-day old larvae in it.

I won't go into the chaos that followed, but the next couple of months included what felt like endless queen cells, a swarm, a simple split that was aborted when I couldn't find the queen, a second split, trying to use the Pagden method this time, but I got it wrong, prompting yet another swarm; two lost queens and a failed attempt to introduce a new queen (generously donated by Malcolm); visits from two experienced beekeepers whom Malcolm, pityingly, asked to come and give me a hand; endless panicky building of more boxes and frames and, finally, the impulse-buy of a large and somewhat feisty colony from the association apiary at Slab Castle, which was offloading excess stock before amalgamating with the site at Horsted Green Park. The end result? Thanks to the in-person help of Paul Lindström and Helen Hadley, plus a lorryload of WhatsApp advice from Malcom and my fellow newbies, 10 weeks after that little nuc arrived I had three active, growing colonies, all on brood and a half, all with (more-or-less) marked queens, and all colonies starting to fill up the supers.

Part of my early difficulties were that, due to a summer of on/off ill-health, I missed two vital teaching sessions, one on swarm control, and another on gathering and processing honey, and though I read and re-read the advice in the teaching folder and on several reputable BKA websites, it wasn't until I had a couple of months of weekly inspections under my belt that I began to get the hang of spotting eggs, counting larval days, and understanding the finer detail of what was going on in the hive. Also the group I was assigned to for Bee Safari, when beginners spend a day visiting both each other's apiaries and those of an experienced beekeeper, never got to do its rounds, as on the day our lead keeper had a family emergency and had to cancel. But I did make the online lesson on bee biology, and the sessions at the association apiary at Horsted Green Park on varroa control and preparing the hives for winter, all of which were invaluable. I also still have pages and pages of WhatsApp discussions with Malcom and the other 2024 students, all full of useful advice about splits, dealing with collapsing colonies, feeding, the finer detail of varroa control, introducing and handling queens and much more.

The hives tucked up for winter clad with roofing membranes and covered in woodpecker safe netting.

Looking back over my season's notes, I can see my confidence and knowledge growing with every inspection and every teaching session. I was stung twice – both times entirely my fault; I got reasonably good at building National frames while also drinking Prosecco; and, in early September, was lucky enough to be graced with a visit from the (very nice, if shockingly young) regional bee inspector. He spent two highly educational hours with me going through all three hives, showing me how to identify chalk brood and drone-cell uncapping, and discussing DWV, chronic bee paralysis, foul brood and more. If anyone ever felt nervous about having their hives inspected, please don't: it was an enjoyable and very useful afternoon – and of course great to see my colonies given a clean bill of health.

But what of the honey – the point, I guess, of all of this? You'll remember I missed the session on honey processing… Well, I re-read the relevant bit of my beginner's book, and in August collected a few frames from each of my hives. I uncapped them, fitted them into the extractor, spun them out and poured the honey into the settling tank. To give time for the honey to settle and any air bubbles to rise out, I stood the tank on the edge of the prep table in our walk-in chiller, with a bucket beneath in case of any drips, and left it alone for 24 hours. During which time the honey gate failed, and all but a few inches of my lovely, oh-so-hard-won honey ran out of the tank, overfilled the bucket and spilled all over the chiller floor. I was left with about four – count 'em – jars.

But guess what? They were delicious. Stonking. Absolutely and definitively the best honey in the world; I won't hear anyone say different.

And that, friends, was the very tasty end to my non-mental Beekeeping Journey. Or at least for now: I'm already mulling which teaching sessions I'd like to join next year. See you in the classroom!

The 2025 Beginner's Course

By Malcom Wilkie

Beginners will have 4 introductory sessions. Those who show aptitude and commitment will then be able to sign up for the whole course

- Introductory sessions. Cost £75
- Main course. Cost £175 including membership of the Association until September

All sessions are important. We do not run catch up sessions and a call to another course participant is never ever a substitute. Sessions can be changed if weather conditions prevent hive inspections. An alternative will usually be offered so please be flexible. You may be asked to travel out of area for one or two sessions.

Introductory sessions

Saturday 22nd February - Initial introduction (MW, HH)
How a hive works and protective equipment needed

Tuesday 4th March - via zoom 7:30pm (MW, PC)
The basics of bee biology. Mind blowing

Saturday 12th April - 11:30am-1pm - Swarm control (RG, KO, DP)
Navigating your way out of disaster. A theory session at the Horsted apiary in the hangar.

Saturday 26th April - Introduction to the Bees (SB, PH, PL, M.Wilcox)
Opening a hive for real.

If continuing you should have ordered your flat packed hive for building on May 10th

Main Course

Saturday 10th May - (a whole day) - Swarm control for real (MW, M. Wilcox)
Horsted apiary 10am to 12pm (or longer if necessary)
1pm - 4pm Building your hive (MW, C, RG, SB, M. Wilcox)

Saturday 28th June - 10am to 4pm - Bee Safari
To lead: SB, PE, KO, DP

Saturday 12th July - 11am to 1pm - Varroa control options - (MW, RG)
Horsted apiary

Saturday 2nd August - 10am to 3pm - Honey extraction (PC, PL)
Beginners and members
Horsted apiary

Saturday 13th September - Preparing hives for winter - 10am - 12pm (KO, RG)
Horsted apiary

Other sessions may be offered depending on course participants.

The sooner you get the bees the easier it will be to learn and progress. However if you have no experience you may need to wait and buy a nucleus of bees in June or July. No use shelling out loads of money to find you are highly allergic to bee stings.

The one requirement I make is that everyone should read my article on the website called Training overview. And their wives, husbands or partners should also read it. If you have any children, they should read it too. Discuss this with them before you sign up. If the whole family are not up for the challenge, it probably won't work.

Please tell anyone that you think might be interested about this course.

There is a registration page on the website << here >>

DIY – How to make moulds for candle making

By Andy Hayward

My inspiration for making a silicone mould was the idea of making a candle from the fruit of a tree pollinated by my bees, and the wax being from the orchard hives.

To achieve this connection, I needed moulds made from apples and pears from the orchard.

Then came the decision of what container to use to hold the mould – not too big, wasting silicone, not too small making the fruit sit too close to the edge so making the silicone mould too thin.

Plastic yogurt pots and drinks bottles cut down to size seems to be ideal to hold the fruit and liquid silicone while it is curing, as seen in the photo of the items needed.

Safety equipment is also needed as the catalyst is toxic and may splash while mixing however, the silicone is quite safe and there are data sheets on the website describing the chemicals involved and precautions needed. The website is www.easycomposites.co.uk, and this is who supplied the silicone kit including the catalyst and instructions. It cost about £30 including postage for 1kg of silicone.

Items needed for making candle moulds; containers, silicon, models, protective gas mask etc.

To ensure there are no patches of unmixed silicon I poured the grey silicone from the tin into a yogurt pot then mixed again and slowly poured into the bottom of the mould until it went over the top of the fruit by at least 5 mm.

I used cocktail sticks to position the fruit central, and double adhesive tape to stick the fruit to the bottom of the pots. However, they came unstuck after pouring and the fruit floated on the liquid silicone! I had to configure a chopping board balanced on the apple and a cocktail stick to hold it down. With the pear an apple stuck onto the cocktail stick held it down.

Completed apple and pear candles with their moulds.

After leaving the silicone to cure for a day it still felt soft so I left it for another day to be sure the thick parts are fully cured.

By slicing half way through the silicone, the fruit can be removed and this leaves only one join line to check when held together with elastic bands. The apple mould was placed back in the yogurt pot to hold it more securely but either way is ok. A hole is cut in the base of the mould then turned upside down to allow the wick to be held and wax poured in.

The main improvement would be to use better adhesive to stick the fruit to the bottom of the container to stop it floating – a hot melt glue or contact adhesive would be better.

In conclusion it was not too difficult to make a mould and not as messy as cleaning wax and pouring candles – drops of silicone peel off the kitchen table much easier than spilled wax!

Summary of the latest HWBKA committee meeting

The HWBKA committee met on 16 October.

A 9-frame honey extractor is now at the Horsted Green park apiary to be motorised by Peter Coxon. It can be rented out to members as long as they sign a form with a disclaimer that "the use is at the user's own risk and HWBKA can not be liable for any harm made while using it". The apiary now has a section with different hive types, moved from the old apiary.

We have decided to charge £10 per head for members and £30 for non-members for wax workshops. More workshops on wax and candles and an introduction to mead making are planned.

For the Beginner's Course we will cooperate with some of the other BKA in the group within Sussex BKA.

Our microscopes were used at the South of England Honeyshow and were a success.

We discussed the use of Epipens for the treatment of anaphylaxis and whether we should have them available at the association's apiary. Some members will have their own Epipens for personal use if they are at significant risk of anaphylaxis from bee stings, and have had them prescribed by a doctor. However, their use is not without risk and greater consideration is necessary. Mark Wilcox will lead a study group to produce a report before next year's beekeeping season begins in earnest. More on Anaphylaxis here.

Sussex BKA has its AGM on 1 March and some committee members from HWBKA will try to attend. Any member of the HWBKA is welcome to attend for that matter.

More books will be bought in order to encourage education and studying for BBKA exams. Helen Chivers and Roxanne Gould will suggest which books to invest in.

The next HWBKA Committee meeting (date to be confirmed) – please submit issues to discuss to our Honorary Secretary Simon Bishop on email (the.hwbka+secretary@gmail.com)

Book review

By Peter Coxon

At the National Honey Show just gone I attended some talks by Steve Riley, a very experienced beekeeper who is currently Chair and Education Officer for Westerham Beekeeper's Association. He is helping to lead an initiative to go treatment free for reasons which are rather obvious and elaborated on in great detail in his excellent book. Many of you will have been bored … or even annoyed with me when I say for as long as we treat for varroa we will continue to have bees that can't cope with varroa… it subverts natural selection.

Inevitably he was also promoting his recent book and so I bought a copy from Great Northern books and highly recommend it.

The Honey Bee Solution to Varroa: A Practical Guide for Beekeepers is about how we can work with our honey bees to develop their natural traits to cope with *Varroa destructor* (varroa). This will enable us to stop using chemical treatments and keep healthy productive colonies… as many have already done.

Riley and his colleagues have worked under guidance from, and in close collaboration with, some of the leading scientists in this field. Emeritus Professor Stephen Martin has written the foreword to this book. Ralph Buchler acted as their guide and mentor during the project. Riley charts their six-year journey from researching and experimenting, to fine tuning management strategies to achieve success and varroa-resistant bees. We benefit from their mistakes and learn lessons from these pioneers.

Over the years I have heard many other similar talks from Stephen Martin, Tom Seeley on the Arnot Forest monitoring project and Ralph Buchler etc. where the conclusions are that feral bee colonies now cope better with Varroa than kept bees and these finding are also elaborated on in the book.

There are 15 short chapters laid out under helpful headings. Included is an extensive reference section and recommended reading list, and a useful appendix that charts a stepping-stone approach toward achieving the goal of varroa-resistance. The photographs and diagrams are clear and explanatory, especially the picture of chewed-out pupae on the bottom board, which are a key feature in the selection of resistant bees. The pictures enhance the text and teach us how to find out which colonies are uncapping and recapping brood, which is another strategic feature to note in the process.

Monitoring using open mesh floors (OMF) and bottom boards is advised because we want to study more than just mites. "When you insert a varroa board under an OMF, you have a research lab generating a wealth of information."

This book is well written, and the instructions and explanations are clear, concise, and easy to understand. It will be popular with beekeepers because one of its key features is the simplicity of the methods used for attaining varroa resistance, and the ease of replication making this goal achievable for the newest beekeeper… although there will be losses and tears too as I know to my cost.

We learn the history of treatment-free beekeeping and how South African beekeepers have never treated for varroa. Colonies were lost after varroa arrived in South Africa, but in 5-8 years the colonies that survived built up and developed a resistance that enabled them to flourish. We discover that several groups of UK beekeepers have been working together for some years already to successfully achieve this goal.

One of the key things about solving livestock problems is to fully understand the biology of the animals involved. Riley does an excellent job of explaining the life history of varroa and how varroa resistant colonies manage them. Riley's book is up to date which makes it so useful for beekeepers studying for modular exams.

The author states that, "mainstream beekeeping does not currently teach about selection for varroa-resistance. As a result, the honey bee and varroa relationship is moving further out of balance. By using miticides, beekeepers are unwittingly removing the natural selection pressure on their honeybees to deal with the mites. The result is a cycle of breeding from bees which are susceptible to varroa" … however, I did also hear in another presentation that treatment free beekeeping is now on the National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB) syllabus! … probably the most prestigious and onerous qualification in beekeeping.

The Honey Bee Solution to Varroa is a timely publication when the world is seeking better ways to live sustainably and be less reliant on chemicals to solve problems. Every beekeeper needs to be aware of what is going on with modern varroa management, even if they do not plan to follow the advice shared in this ideal guidebook.

Title: The Honey Bee Solution to Varroa: A Practical Guide for Beekeepers
Author: Steve Riley
Publisher: Northern Bee Books
Year Published: 2024
Paperback, 131 pages
ISBN 978-1-914934-77-3
Cost: £20
Available: Northern Bee Books https://www.northernbeebooks.co.uk/and other good bookstores

Steve Riley is also our guest speaker at our Bee Market on 17th May and will have his books available for sale … and signing. – see 2025 Bee Market | Sussex Beekeepers Association

Rescuing bees

By Keith Obbard

Taking bees out of a building is an interesting exercise, but not one that I'm keen on, but a friend in Groombridge asked if we could remove a colony from an empty outbuilding, so I said yes.

When the bees are in an occupied house and especially if there are hung tiles the best solution is to walk away quickly!

In this case the bees were fairly high up in the corner of an old Oast House, but easily accessible from the inside, so it didn't present any problem as far as access was concerned.

The colony was between the studding, behind some old scruffy plasterboard, which was scheduled for replacement in any case so our job was simply to remove the bees. Ripping off the plasterboard didn't matter and it was up to someone else to make good.

We were so engrossed in taking out the bees and putting the combs into frames that we forgot to take any photos of the most interesting process I'm sorry to say!

The nest is opened up.

Among the stuff you need to prepare when rescuing a bee colony is empty frames and rubber bands or stainless wires to tie up some of the old comb.

I'll list out the equipment and schedule of work involved;

Having assessed the situation outside and in, we covered all the windows except for one, with black-out to prevent the loose bees going to all the windows and becoming a nuisance. We kept one window clear, and slightly open so that they would be attracted to the light and go out and not bother us.

Firstly we laid out the tools on a table covered with a plastic sheet to work on.

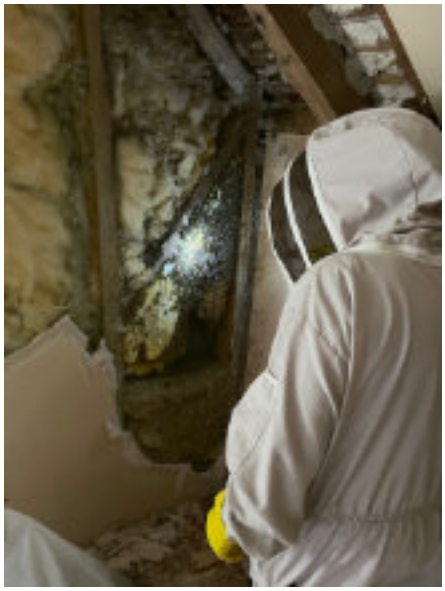
Full beesuits are essential, although generally the bees will be quite placid, there will be a lot on the floor, and as you know they like to walk up!

Rubber gloves and buckets of water will be needed to wash sticky hands and tools.

Hammer, chisel, jemmy (wrecking) bar, torch, long knives, hivetool, and of course a camera for The Apiarist article!

A suitable brood box to take the brood frames into which you are going to place the combs. This will need a solid floor and a cloth top to keep the bees in as much as possible. The box needs to be close to the "operating table" where the combs are cut and fitted into the frames with elastic bands to keep them in place.

Also a plastic box with lid for the odd bits of honey comb that can't be fitted into a frame, as well as a sack or box for the old black and empty combs which needs to be safely disposed of.



Keith with the bee nest exposed.

Don't forget that the colony might be diseased, so any old unused combs will need to be burned and buried as though they had EFB.

While you are cutting out the combs from the wall, keep a keen eye out for the queen when you get to the brood nest.

You almost certainly won't see her, but have a queen clip handy just in case!

She will hide away in the dark corners as you open up the nest, so any little cluster of bees needs to be very carefully gathered up and put in the brood box.

There will be bees flying to the window, where you can sweep them up and add to the box too.

Once al the bee comb is removed the bee's entrance needs to be sealed off and we had some of that expanding hard-setting foam in a can, which seemed to work quite well.

I also sprayed the area of the bee's nest and around the entrance with "Bee-Go", a product designed to clear supers that smells of almonds. The bees definitely don't like it.

We set up the hive of transferred combs with a floor and roof as near as we could to the entrance to the original bee's nest but could only put it on a work-bench.

If we could have, we would have liked to put it much higher, on a tall stepladder or scaffold tower, but we didn't have access to anything suitable.

You will soon know if you have captured the queen in your box, because like a swarm the bees will start to fan and attract down the bees flying around the old entrance.

This wasn't happening for us, and I was concerned that we hadn't got the queen.

I returned the next day, and my fears were confirmed as there was just a handful of bees in the brood box and most of them had found their way back into the Oast House, forming a swarm-like cluster near the window.

I swept these all up with a dust-pan and brush, and took them back outside and tipped into my brood box.

One of those Bee Swarm Vacuum devices would be super useful if you wanted to do this sort of thing regularly!

At the second time of trying I must have got the queen because they started to fan at the hive entrance, and I left them to settle down overnight and took the hive away the next day.

The colony is now in our new apiary and although very small is still alive, so we will keep our fingers crossed that it survives the winter, and has some good genes.

A "Newbees" Year

By Kate Purves

I joined the association a few years ago when I purchased my first nucleus of bees. All seemed to go quite well until the spring when they swarmed... I did manage to retrieve them, which was slightly miraculous as it involved climbing a fence whilst heavily pregnant! Then they decided to leave again and I lost the remaining weak colony to wasps despite my various efforts to save them. I had made this attempt at beekeeping via the 'self-teaching' method which clearly did not go too well!

Therefore, in 2024, after a couple of years break from "beekeeping" I decided the best course of action would be to learn how to be a beekeeper properly, so I joined the 2024 beginners course.

We started off in February with a theory session with an introduction to beekeeping and its history, siting your hive and bee biology. This felt like a lot of numbers to remember but happily at the end of the day we were presented with the HWBKA Beginners Course handbook. This A5 binder is my 'bee bible', it has been invaluable throughout this first year giving you an idea of what comes next and guidance about the processes.

I then joined the associations bee biology Zoom call session in early March which again felt quite terrifying about the numbers to remember, but the penny started to drop about how important some of these numbers were to know such as how long different hatching processes took. It was also a good reminder about how the different bees looked to be able to identify your workers, queen and drones. I confess a lot of the more complex information went straight over my head but it felt like a great session in terms of adding to my knowledge.

The "double nuc" arrived.

My intention had just been to spend the year learning about beekeeping and then decide from there whether to give things another go, but somehow by the beginning of March I had been persuaded to arrange to purchase a nuc of bees....

April was a flurry of activity. Firstly, we had the association wide Swarming session lead by Rob at the Apiary. This session was invaluable, we were given our handout of notes at the start of the session and by the end mine was covered in extra bits of information. Little facts like one frame of brood equals three frames of bees, information about how to split colonies and how to know you need to do it, how to be prepared in case you need to split, marking your frames with drawing pins where the queen cells are and how to make up your split in your nuc box. I started to understand where I may have gone wrong the first time around and suddenly felt like I actually understood a few things about beekeeping, how bee communities work and what we can or cannot do to assist them (or control them depending on your perspective).

The other things I learnt very clearly at this session is that there is no one correct way to do things, every beekeeper seems to have their own way of doing things with their own logic and you have to find your own way being able to seek support from other members who may take a similar approach to yours.

Then came the day, the evening of Thursday the 11th April, I collected my bees from Helen Hadley. A double nuc! Twelve frames of bees! I had been speaking with Malcolm in the week leading up to this to make sure I was ready; I had spent the beginning of April blowtorching and scraping my hive to get it all clean and concreting a new base in the field for the hive to stand on, in the new location I had chosen following our very first session about where to locate your hive to be best for your bees.

Helen skilfully managed to squeeze this tower of bees into the back of my Freelander and I carefully drove home praying all would go well and they wouldn't fall over or escape in the car! Once home I wrangled the tower of bees out of the car and onto a Nuc stand, strapped it all together, opened the door and hoped that they would still be there in the morning. They were, hooray!

Come the Saturday morning Malcolm and the other beginners arrived at my house for us to spend a dedicated beginners' session hiving the bees.

Wow there were a lot of bees in those boxes, even Malcolm said he had never hived so many bees before.

But they were beautiful, so calm and with Malcolm showing us what to look for, how to handle them correctly and explaining again the setup of their community we did it with confidence and ended up with a jam packed hive full of happy, healthy bees. What a joy! It was slightly more complex than planned as we needed to get 12 frames of bees into a WBC (which only has space for 10 frames) but with Malcolm's expertise we managed it. Malcolm also showed us how to clip the wing of the queen as he was concerned that with so many bees there was a risk that they would swarm straight away so this would limit the distance that they could travel and hopefully enable me to retrieve them if needed.

We set up a WhatsApp group for us beginners so we could support each other and also with Malcolm so we could ask questions. This group has been fantastic; it has felt like a really safe space to ask what may feel like a silly question.

After the hiving and chatting with Malcolm we decided that it would be best for me to give the colony more room by going to brood and a half to prevent them swarming. Therefore, the following day I went back in, on my own, opened up the hive and have them a super box with foundation to allow them to have some more space. First challenge complete, a real sense of satisfaction mixed with hope that this would work and they wouldn't want to swarm.

I had fed them some fondant to keep them going when there was a starvation warning but the nectar flow had started and by the end of May things were looking good, the brood super was drawn out and full of stores, lots of brood and young bees. Then we reached mid-June... charged queen cells! Out came my swarming session notes covered in my scribble and away I went... Feeling confident that I knew what I was doing I performed my split. I captured my queen in a clip, split her into a nuc with brood, stores and space. I also created an insurance policy by putting a couple of queen cells and a frame of stores covered in bees into an extra nuc box, closed this up and popped this into deep shade for a couple of days before moving it to its proper location.

The last weekend in June brought the excitement of the bee safari, I had never seen inside someone else's hive so I was really looking forward to this. We started at my house, Peter Coxon and the other arrived and we went through the hives, all looked well. We then went to another member's Apiary and performed a split and finally to Peter's house to see his apiary and bee shed. Such an information and useful day, getting to be hands on with other peoples hives and see other equipment we may need for later in the year. We learned about record keeping and Peter shared his hive record sheets with us, we saw two colonies that were being combined using paper and we even uncapped comb and tested the water content and spun some honey which Peter had taken off his hives. Topped off with some lovely tea and scones, what could be better.

The view from the top floor at the Sandown Park Racecourse.

The National Honey Show October 2024

By Paul Lindström

I've been on my way to NHA, the National Honey Show that is, many times, but for one reason or other I haven't managed to make it happen. Until this year when I decided it was well over time to check it out. And I was very happy to have gone, because there was so much to see and do. I attended a couple of seminars, but didn't have time for any of the work shops. I didn't compete in any of the Honeyshow classes either, but I knew there would be several HWBKA beekeepers who did. And as we will see later they did very well.

The first seminar I attended was a lecture by Sean Stephenson on Microscopy. Sean lead a workshop for us so I knew he was good. Among other things he recommended the database on pollen called PolDat free to use at no charge. He also gave us a bunch of other useful tips on microscopy.

The next lecture I attended was by Phil Stevenson from the Cornell University at Kew Gardens. The title was "Sex, Drugs and Pollinator Health" which sounded intriguing. His take was that pollinators exchange food for sex, which probably is true. He talked about the types of nectar that actually contain toxins, for example Rhododendron which contain grayanotoxins. Appearantly such honey was called "Mad Honey" and was used as a biological weapon since ancient times. For example it was used in the Black Sea region during the Third Mithridatic War (65 BCE). King Mithridates staged a strategic withdrawal from Roman soldiers under General Pompey. Possibly under the counsel of Greek botanist Kateuas, Mithridates had the withdrawing soldiers place combs of mad honey on their path. The Roman soldiers who ate the honey succumbed to mad honey intoxication and were slain. The Greek geographer Strabo described the incident as having wiped out three maniples of Romans, which could mean anywhere from 480 to 1,800 soldiers. Fancy that!

Sean Stephenson answering questions after his lecture on Microscopy.

Phil then described all the useful qualities of honey and gave many interesting examples of this.

The last lecture I attended on the Thursday was by Jaques van Alphen on "Resitance against Varroa". I reviewed his latest book *Honeybees, a natural and a less natural history* in the October 2024 issue of The Apiarist, so it was interesting to hear him talk about some of the chapters of the book. Sussex BKA sponsored his talks, so our own Peter Coxon introduced van Alphen before the talk (Peter is the Chairman of SBKA).

Professor van Alphen gave several examples of projects world wide where beekeepers have managed to breed Varroa resistant bees within 5-6 years, which is very encouraging. I spoke to Peter Coxon after the lecture and we are both inspired to start some type of experiment along the thinking of van Alphen in our own apiaries. We realise we will loose colonies along the way but if we continue to medicate our bees against Varroa we will breed non-resistant bees and go against "natural selection" and never be able to help the bees to get more resistant against Varroa. Food for thoughts definitely.

Professor Jaques van Alphen (right, standing on the podium platform!) with Peter Coxon.

In the second day, Friday, I attended yet another lecture, this time by Jenny Roberts from Lancaster University. The title was "An engineering perspective on the power of propolis". Jenny is a Mechanical Engineer and among her projects is to design a device to help disabled beekeepers to lift supers. In order to be able to do this she needs to define the different properties of propolis, like what strength is needed on the motors in order to be able to separate the supers. In order to scientifically analyse the propolis she has initiated a "citizen science project" launched in spring 2024, involving over 50 beekeepers who installed propolis traps in their hives. This project supports "the largest UK propolis research study of its kind, aiming to uncover new applications for this remarkable substance".

I also went to the lecture by Dr. Emma Gardner, another lecture arranged by Bee Craft. The title was "Simulating the lives of wild bees: how

Jenny Roberts studies the properties of propolis.

There were lots and lots of entries in the honeyshow – all kinds of colours and textures of the honey.

we model bees and how that can help us create more bee-friendly landscapes". Emma is a Quantitative Ecologist and Modeller at the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology.

It was interesting to hear how they build computer models that simulate the lives of bees. The intent is to influence policy-makers, farmers and communities in order to help build more bee friendly landscapes.

I actually went to a second lecture by Jaques van Alphen in the afternoon, but before that I took the opportunity to explore the show floor and see what the vendors had on offer.

Northumberland Honey make all sorts of products from honey and bees wax, but also have an advanced breeding program. Their pet project is to help restore the native small Black bee population. There are several of us beekeepers from HWBKA that have bought Black bee queens from them, and they have a lovely temper and seems to do well. I will do a proper interview with them to learn more about how they breed bees and come back with aan article about this in a later issue of The Apiarist.

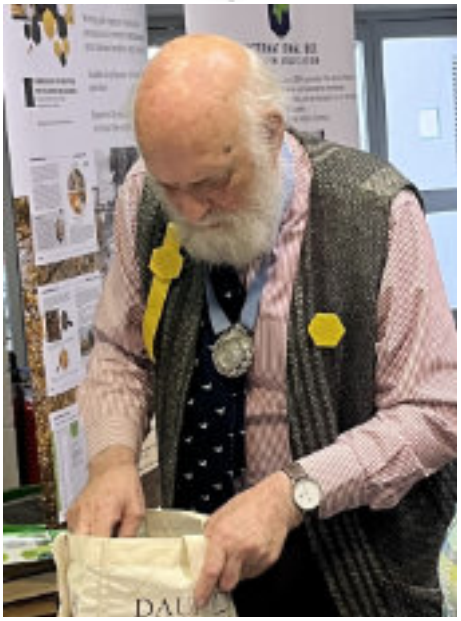
I enjoyed very much to taste different types of honey in the stand for the new organisation called "The Honey Guild". I learned that Ivy honey needs to mature for at least 6 months before it tastes good, so this explains why the ivy honey I started to gather tasted so awful that I aborted the attempt. I will try again next year.

I spoke to Jeremy "Jerry" Burpridge at the Northern Bee Books and will review some new books from them later. He is the Honorary President of the Honeyshow.

Malcolm Wilkie, Lesley Francis and Rob Gore were among the winners from HWBKA at The National Honeyshow.

I will definitely come back again and can recommend the show wholeheartedly.

Suzie and Luke Hutchinson art Northumberland Honey showed their different products and also promoted their breeding programme.



Jerry Burbidge from Northern Bee Books, President of The National Honeyshow.

Come and learn all about the fascinating world of bees at the

Sussex Beekeepers' Association

Bee Market

Saturday 17th May 2025 - 10 am to 4.30 pm

Uckfield College

Downsview Crescent, Uckfield TN22 3DJ

EVERYONE WELCOME - ADMISSION £2

Talks on honey bees and beekeeping:
'The Honeybee Solution to Varroa in the South East'
by Steve Riley
'How To Take Up Beekeeping'
by Malcolm Wilkie
Bees, plants and honey on sale
Equipment auction
Trade stands
Interactive Children's Bee Workshop
Refreshments and snacks available
Workshops, advice and much more!

https://sbka.info/?page_id=159

Dates for your calendar

Bee Banters
The venues haven't been confirmed yet but the Bee banters normally take place the last Wednesday in the month. Check the web site for updates.

Saturday January 18th 9:45-11:45am
Beginners mead making demonstration and tasting
Venue: Five Ashes Village Hall.
Please sign up for the mead course on the HWBK Events page.

Saturday February 22nd
Session 1 – Beginners Course – Introduction to Beekeeping
How a hive works and protective equipment needed.
Venue: ??
(***New beekeepers only***).

Tuesday March 4th via ZOOM 7:30pm
Session 2 – The basics of bee biology. Mind blowing.
(***New beekeepers only***).

Saturday April 12th @ 11:30am-1pm
Session 3 – Swarm control
Navigating your way out of disaster.
Venue: Horsted Green Park Apiary.
(***New beekeepers only***).

Saturday April 26th 9.30am-12.30pm
Session 4 – Introduction to the bees
Opening a hive for real.
Venue: Horsted Green Park Apiary
(***New beekeepers only***).

Saturday May 10th 10am-12pm
Session 5a – Swarm control for real

Saturday May 10th 1pm-4pm
Session 5b – Building your hive
Venue: Horsted Green Park Apiary

Saturday 17th May
Sussex Beekeepers Bee Market
Venue: Uckfield College.

Saturday June 28th
Session 6 – Bee Safari (open to all) am or pm depending on your group leader. A visit to three apiaries. Please express interest on HWBK Events page.

Saturday July 13th (open to all) 11am-1pm
Session 7 Varroa control options
Venue: Horsted Green Park Apiary

Saturday August 2nd 10am-3pm)
Session 8 – Honey extraction
Venue: Horsted Green Park Apiary (open to all).

Saturday 28th September 10am-12pm
Session 9 – Preparing hives for Winter
Venue: Horsted Green Park Apiary (open to all).

23d, 24th & 25th October
National Honey Show
Venue: Sandown Park, Esher, Surrey

More events might be listed on our web site – check it regularly for the latest updates.

HWBKA Committee 2023-2024

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

Chairman: Malcolm Wilkie (the.hwbka+chair@gmail.com)

Honorary Secretary: Simon Bishop (the.hwbka+secretary@gmail.com)

Honorary Treasurer: Phil Edwards (the.hwbka+treasurer@gmail.com)

Magazine Editor, Vice Chairman and Assistant Apiary Manager: Paul Lindström (the.hwbka+apiarist@gmail.com)

Apiary Manager: Peter Coxon

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

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

Committee members: Roxanne Gould and 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)
For more Bee Inspectors see the National Bee Unit web site.

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.

The older tangential 6-frame extractor

The 3-frames 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. Deposit by cash but final payment paid directly into the HWBKA bank account (same as when paying your membership fee etc).

For info, availability and booking call 01435-88 35 65 (preferred). Or call or text mobile 07833-088 766.
Or email: the.hwbka+apiarist@gmail.com • Address: The Clock Tower, Southover, Spring Lane, Burwash, TN19 7JB

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 if you would like to borrow one or more books