ISSUE
July 2025

The Apiarist

. . .High Weald Beekeepers' Newsletter

Chairman's Chatter

By Malcolm Wilkie

Well what a season it has been so far. The sustained high Spring temperatures meant colonies grew extra large and those who were aware added supers and got a Spring honey crop. As the farmer in Combe valley planted rape we had a bumper Spring harvest down here in St Leonards. Quite a challenge but most of it is now in buckets.

The Summer flow seems to have started early and a lot of hives here in the garden are groaning under the weight of the supers.

I personally have been doing some queen rearing and now have 6 mated queens in Apidea mating hives. These queens are granddaughters of a Queen bought from the Northumberland honey company and so far it is a strain that appears slow to swarm. Over the 15 years I have been beekeeping this is

the first time I have successfully raised by myself my own queens from grafting larvae into plastic cups. I have progressed just a little on my own journey. And what about each one of you? Have you had a successful season? What new things have you learned? Have you successfully controlled swarming?

For those wishing to progress, join in with the training programme offered. Think about putting yourself forward for taking the Basic Assessment. Sign up to do the preparation to do module 2 with Simon Tuck. The module is all about honey and forage. Studying for it will take time and effort but you'll be a better beekeeper for it. Make sure you keep back honey to enter in our own show in November. And of course follow the season and the challenges thrown up by the weather by joining the HWBKA WhatsApp group if you haven't already done so.

Asian hornets have been reported near us in Hastings. We suspect a primary nest in Alexandra Park. These high temperatures will be helping their expansion. Be vigilant, be very vigilant.

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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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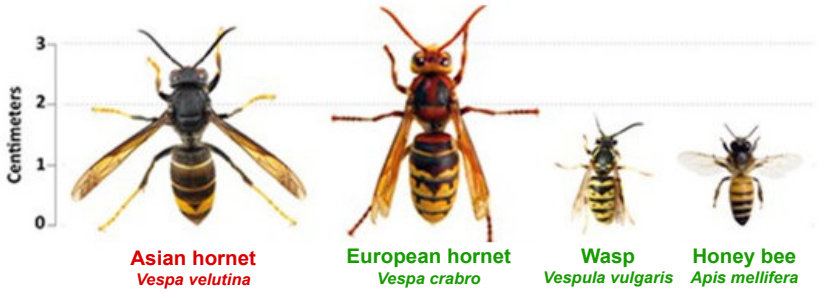
Next issue: October 2025

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



Report through the Asian hornet Watch app or www.bit.ly/asianhornetreport

Seminar review

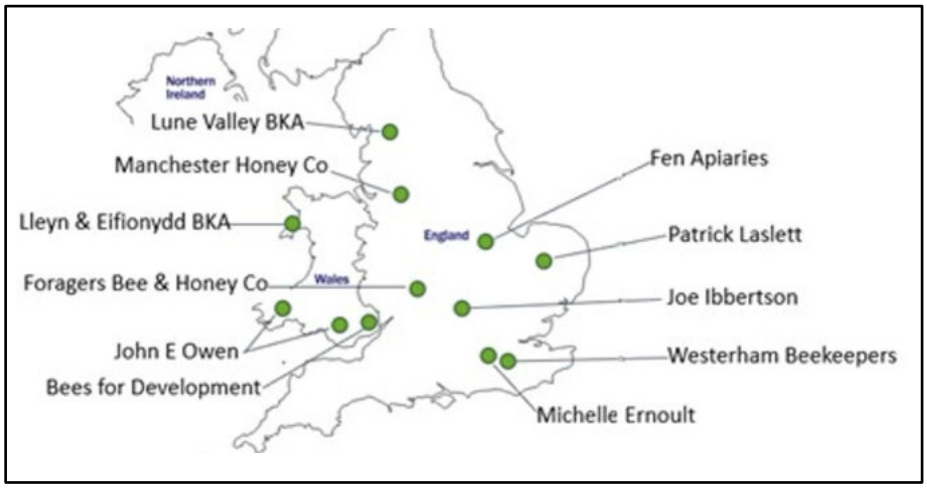
By Peter Coxon

Seminar: 2025 SBKA Bee Market talk by Steve Riley – The Honey Bee Solution to Varroa in the South East

In a previous edition of the Apiarist, I wrote a brief review of Steve Riley's excellent book, "Honey Bee Solution to Varroa", having heard him give several excellent talks at the 2024 National Honey Show.

I also invited him to be our keynote speaker at the 2025 SBKA Bee Market after which the feedback was very positive. He was kind enough to allow me access to the presentation so that I could share with you some of the very important points he made.

It is undoubtedly the case that beekeepers treating for varroa in the early 90s probably prevented a large-scale collapse of the bee population. However, current thinking is highlighting the rather obvious fact that by treating for varroa we are subverting the process of natural selection and that for as long as we continue to do so we'll continue



breeding bees that can't cope with varroa.

Steve is the Education Officer at Westerham Beekeepers (see map) where they, along with many others are spearheading activities to go treatment free. Their record of success speaks for itself, circa 130+ colonies not using miticides having started with 28 and now in their 8th season of not treating …and they are not alone.

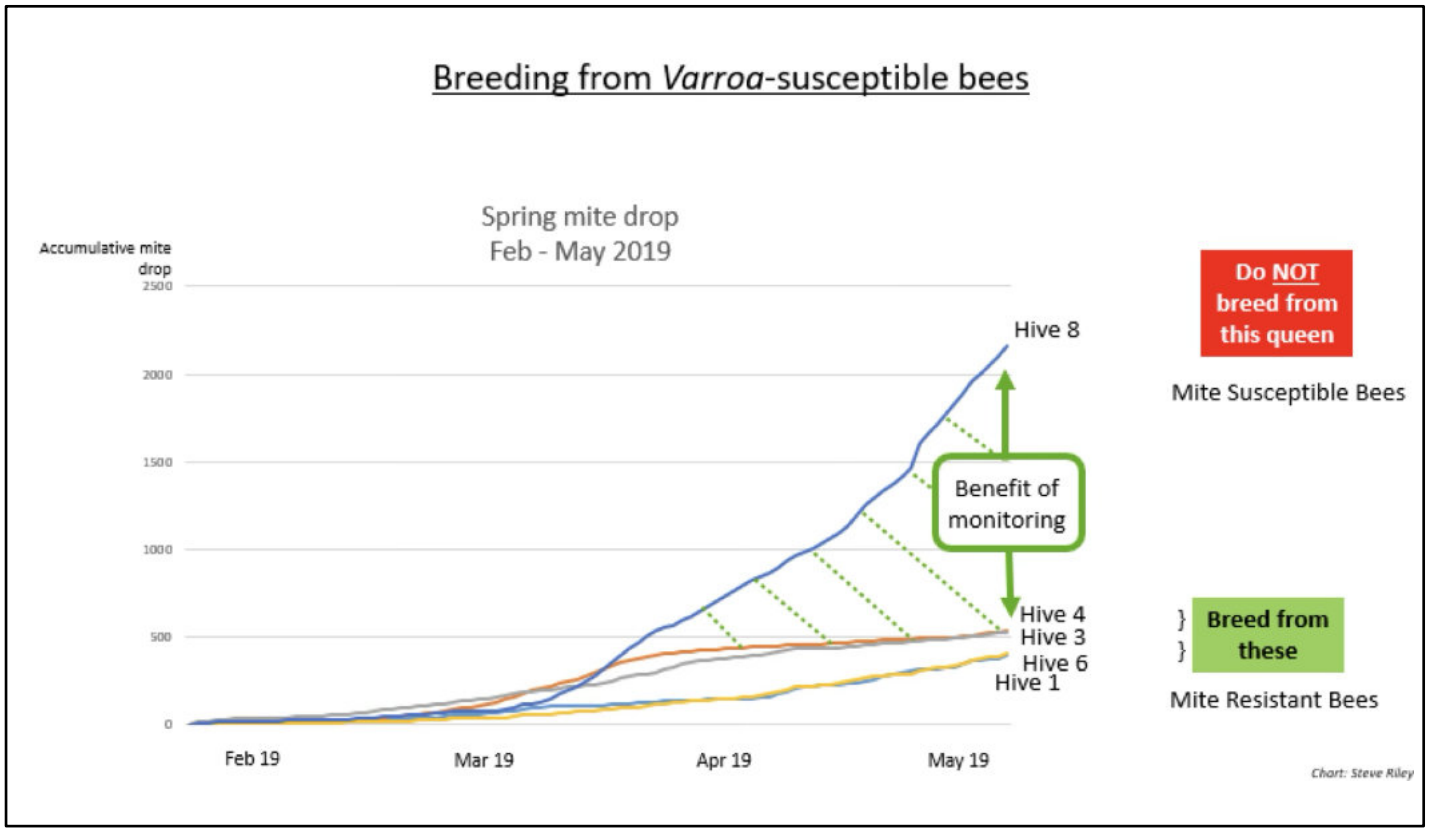
The groups in North Wales on the LLeyn Peninsular, Rhona Toft (Foragers Bee & Honey Co, Worcestershire) and many more show similar success stories which you can read about here.

In years gone by treatment free beekeepers were often derided and scorned for causing problems for other beekeepers. The world-famous Randy Oliver has been heard to talk about such folk causing 'varroa bombs' for others in their area.

However, studies by Thomas Seeley in the Arnot forest in USA, Ralph Büchler in Germany and others have shown for many years that feral bees now cope better with varroa than do domestically kept bees.

Steve pointed out that in areas of the world where treatment was never an option on grounds of cost or where treatment was banned on ideological grounds as in Cuba, bees have now evolved to thrive in the presence of varroa.

The reluctance to try this is partly due to the idea that 'it is rather like jumping off a cliff' and the consequences can be very painful … an idea to which I can attest having tried it.



However, what we learn from Steve's talk and book is that there are much more intelligent ways of going about this and in the presentation, he tackled 6 particular aspects.

1) Why we still have a Varroa problem

a) Varroa-susceptible bees => Bees dependent on treatments to survive as varroa multiply unhindered in unhygienic colonies

b) 9,694 imported Queens … not treated / non-resistant / not locally adapted

c) no selection for resistant/ hygienic traits even from commercial UK suppliers of bees so essentially people are breeding mite susceptible bees by not trying to do otherwise.

2) The biology of Varroa-resistance

3) Monitoring for Varroa-resistant traits

4) Monitoring case studies

Given the amount of data presented in these 3 sections it would be all but impossible to cover these 3 points in sufficient detail to do them justice.

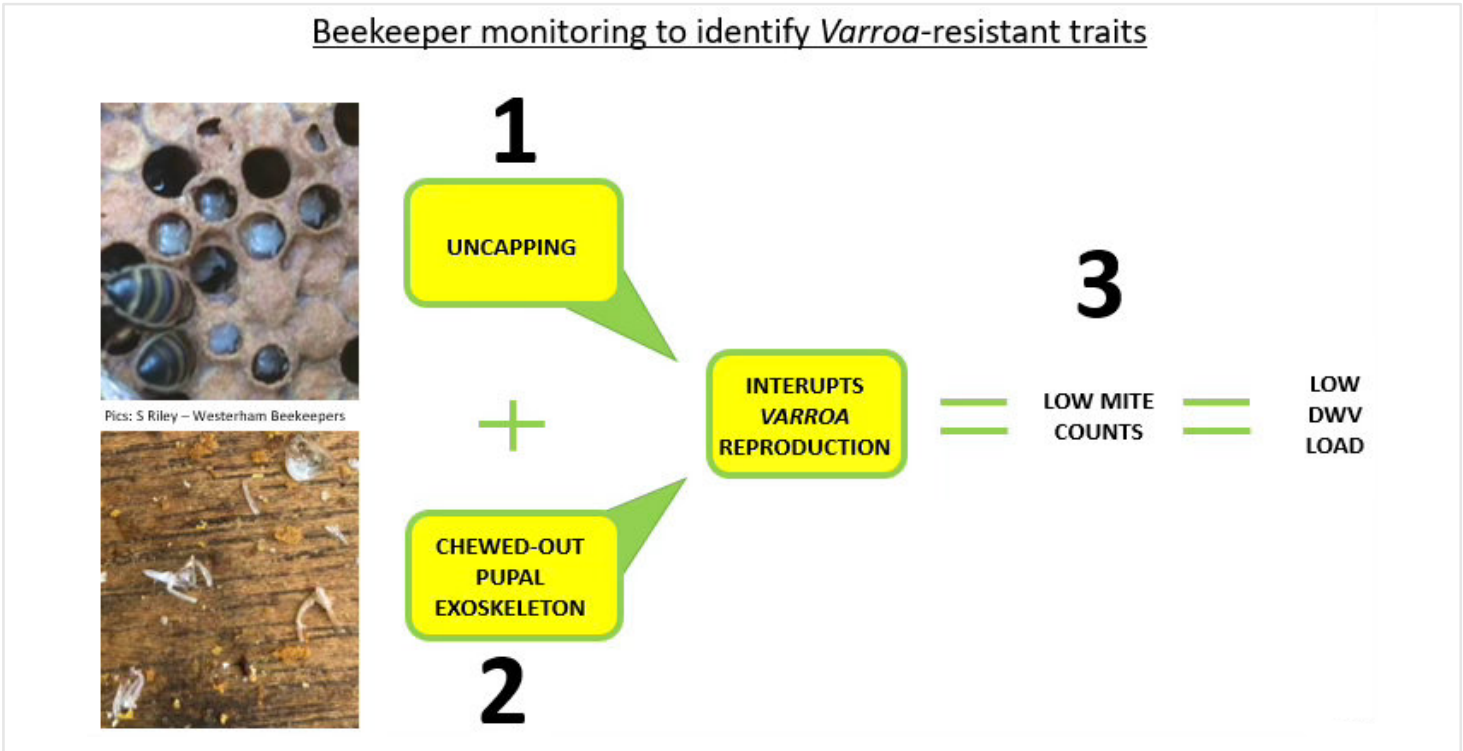
Examine the inspection boards more often and more rigorously – looking for bits of chewed out grubs as an indication of hygienic traits.

So, to summarise in my words

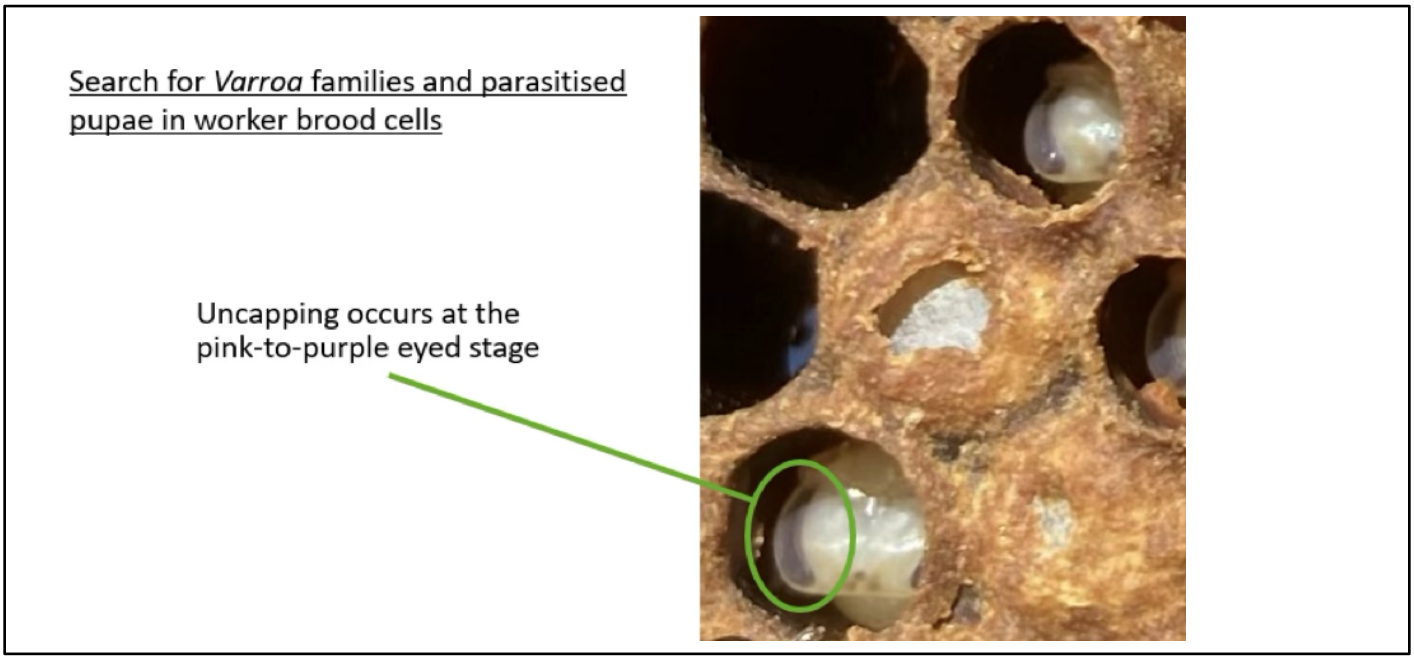
- It's all about upping our game,
  - a) as to where we source bees
  - b) by inspecting our bees much more diligently looking for indications of hygienic behaviour;
    - i) this includes monitoring frames to look for uncapping / resealing.
    - ii) examining the inspection boards more often and rigorously looking for bits of chewed out grubs as an indication of hygienic traits & not just counting varroa … although this is still extremely important and doing it regularly & not just once a year.

5) Working as a club

a) Set up a club breeding apiary focusing on Varroa-resistant colonies



Work systematically as a beekeeper to identify Varroa-resistant traits in a colony.



b) Westerham Beekeepers breeding apiary set up in 2024;
   i) "not-for-profit" pricing
   ii) locally adapted VR bees
   iii) Many others are following in their wake ...Reigate, Chichester & more
c) Aim to provide bees for members – pass around the genetics, avoid bringing poor traits into the area

6) Steve's Summary

a) VR traits are all over the South East and the UK
b) Start a club project and pool your best VR bees
c) Be cautious – majority out there still of non-resistant bees. The UK has been breeding, selling and importing them for a long time.
d) Don't buy non-resistant bees from suppliers. Ask about VR traits.
e) The pace of change is up to us!

Book review

By Paul Lindström

Insects – Successful Models of Evolution by Werner Gnatzy and Jürgen Tautz. Publisher: Springer Nature, 2025
236 pages
Cost: £24 (eBook), £30 (softcover)

This is what the publisher writes as an introduction: "In the course of evolution, insects have developed an almost unbelievable variety of shapes and functional sophistication. The design of their exoskeleton is so imaginative and unusual, often even bizarre, that one can only marvel. The fact that insects can find design solutions for any problem, no matter how special, makes them extremely successful. They have thus become crucial links in the complex networks of nature. Impressive macro photographs and informative scanning electron-optical images provide an insight into the wealth of forms, beauty and function of the six-legged creatures. Fascinating texts accompany the pictures and explain, among other things, how the great diving beetle uses vertebrate hormones as knock-out drops when attacked by fish, the pine moth beetle locates distant forest fires, the bombardier beetle emits pulsed explosions with its firing apparatus or the blue butterfly caterpillar glamours ants. Insects play a crucial role in the ecosystems of our planet. Man-made environmental destruction is interfering with these cycles in a sensitive way. This endangers the survival of insects, with dramatic consequences for us humans as well".

I've just started to read the book and won't try and review it properly here, but can say that it's an interesting read thus far even if it's not only or mainly about bees. There is actually a section headed "Honey bees are not the most important pollinators", and there it's pointed out that around 50% of flowers are pollinated by hoverflies, and only 2-3% by honey bees. 38% of the flowers are pollinated by other insects (for example moths, my comment).

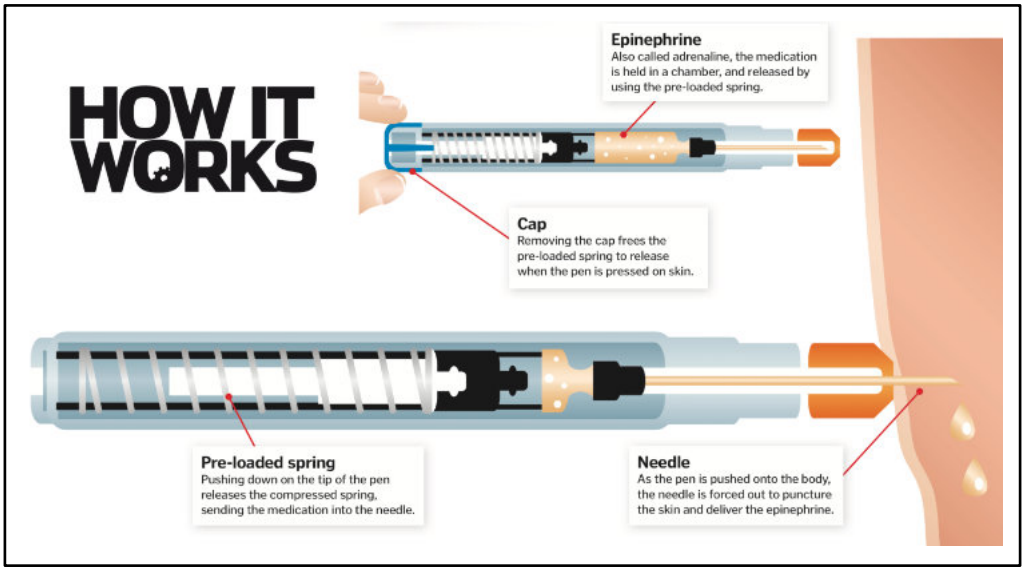
There is a review of this book by Marc Bekoff, Professor Emeritus of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology at the University of Colorado, Boulder, that you can read here. He has interviewed Jürgen Tautz and asked him why they decided to write this book. Jürgen answered: "Publishing in magazines seemingly has only very little effect on what people do to understand what is happening to our planet and what they need to do to make things better. Books written for a wide audience have better chances to influence a higher number of people to help them understand the complexity and vulnerability of nature. This hope is why we wrote this book—balancing solid science with easy to understand text.

I look forward to read the book properly – it's an important topic.

Allergy and Anaphylaxis

By Mark Wilcox & Fiona McKinna (Retired doctors)

Most beekeepers will be stung by their bees, with a frequency dependent on their skills and personal protection, as well as the character of the bees. The effects of stings vary with the number of stings, duration that the sting remains in situ, site on the body and sensitivity of the individual that has been stung. Appropriate use of suitable personal protective equipment will prevent most stings, but most of us use thin gloves, to improve dexterity and hygiene, that are not protective. Any stings that I receive are usually through my gloves and I suspect that this is common.



How an AAI (Adrenaline Auto-Injector) works in principle.

It is important to remove the sting as quickly as possible without squeezing the attached venom bulb. This can be easily achieved by sliding something like a credit card along the skin which pushes the sting away. If stung through your glove, I find the easiest way is to lift the glove up from the skin and then brush the bulb away. The bee's sting apparatus continues to pulsate after being detached from the bee which pumps more venom into the victim, hence the need for its rapid removal. With multiple stings this can be challenging and certainly not easy if you are on your own. The more stings that occur, the worse the symptoms are likely to be and can take up to a week to subside.

The purpose of this article is to explore the reaction of an individual to the injected components of bee venom.

Mild and moderate symptoms from being stung include localised pain and swelling with the skin becoming red and some swelling progressing from the site of the sting. These symptoms are to be expected in most people that are stung and don't necessarily imply an abnormal or allergic response. Histamine is an amine that is present in bee venom and produced by mast cells and basophils in tissue following a sting. It is the main cause of the local (and sometimes systemic) reaction so treatments that inhibit its release can be helpful. These include oral antihistamines and local creams that can be bought from pharmacies without a prescription.

An allergy is where the body reacts to something that's normally harmless like pollen, dust, animal fur, particular foods or medicines, or indeed bee and other insect stings. The symptoms can be mild, but for some people they can be very serious and potentially life threatening. The prevalence of allergic reactions, including severe ones, is increasing for reasons that are not well understood.

In non-sensitive beekeepers, regular stings may help to build immunity to bee venom and reduce local effects to stings, but the converse can be true and why some people suddenly develop a life threatening allergic reaction, having never had problems with bee stings before, is poorly understood. Beekeepers' partners are thought to be at increased risk of anaphylaxis if stung, due to low frequency but regular contact exposure to bee venom via clothing, without being stung.

Unfortunately, bees inject the venom, so severe reactions to stings tend to appear more quickly than ingesting an allergen e.g. eating seafood in sensitive people, but can appear anytime up to 180 minutes after being stung. Increased number of stings and therefore the volume of the venom delivered, also increases the likelihood of a severe reaction. A very small number of people experience a severe reaction that becomes systemic (involving the whole body). This is called anaphylaxis and can be fatal without prompt, effective treatment.

Anaphylaxis is a severe, potentially life-threatening allergic reaction that involves multiple body systems and can escalate within minutes. Anaphylaxis can cause symptoms ranging from skin reactions like hives to more severe respiratory and cardiovascular symptoms, such as airway constriction and a dangerous drop in blood pressure. The rapid onset and intensity of these symptoms make anaphylaxis a true medical emergency.

The symptoms of anaphylaxis include:

A (Airway) swelling and blockage of the airway from tongue, lip and facial swelling. The person may have difficulty talking and complain of itching and a scratching feeling in their throat and mouth. This is not the same as moderate facial swelling around a sting that does not have any other symptoms.

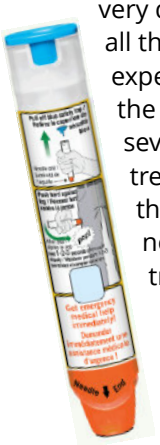
B (Breathing) difficulty with breathing can include hearing the person wheeze, breathing rapidly, feeling dizzy, and not having enough breath to answer questions.

C (Circulation) as swelling occurs in the tissues of the body, this affects the amount of fluid in the bloodstream and the person's blood pressure may become very low. This may mean the person looks very pale, is dizzy and sometimes confused and aggressive or drowsy.

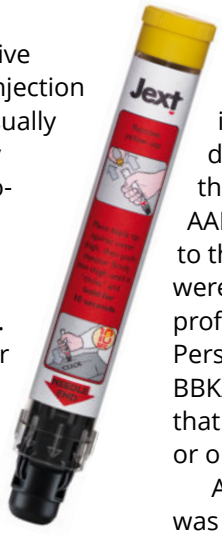
D (Digestion) nausea and/or vomiting, diarrhoea, abdominal pain can occur in some people.

E (Exposure) The skin rash is not limited to the site of the sting but tends to spread, with swelling and redness, sometimes affecting widespread areas of the body.

Untreated, people with anaphylaxis can deteriorate and die very quickly. Some people can get all the above symptoms and some experience only a few, but all of the above symptoms indicate a severe reaction requiring treatment. The only exception is that a skin rash on its own does not require anaphylaxis treatment.



The only effective treatment is an injection of adrenaline, usually administered by Adrenaline Auto-Injectors (AAIs) that are spring loaded devices delivering a set dose of intramuscular adrenaline. Registered trademarks for AAIs include *EpiPen* and *Jext*. There is no evidence for the effectiveness of antihistamines or steroids in the treatment of anaphylaxis and are not recommended as a treatment (but can be useful for non-anaphylaxis reactions). The devices have instructions on the packaging, and are given into the outer side of the thigh into the muscle.



If in doubt however, you are much safer to treat with adrenaline than to worry about whether you should inject someone. The adrenaline only acts for 10- 15 minutes and at worse may cause a headache, rapid pulse rate and facial flushing, but will then wear off. However, if the person feels better within 5 minutes of receiving the injection, then it strongly implies they are suffering from anaphylaxis.

Further treatment includes general supportive measures in hospital, and an immediate call for medical assistance (999) should be made as well as giving the adrenaline. Everyone who suffers this kind of reaction should go to the emergency department of a hospital, regardless of whether they feel better after the injection of adrenaline.

Adrenaline (epinephrine) is a prescription only medicine which means that it is prescribed by a registered doctor for a specific individual. It should only be used for that individual unless directed by a healthcare professional. The use of a pen is not complicated but the issue is whether, when and to whom it should be used on (or not) and that needs knowledge and a small amount of training.

There was an extensive debate by the BBKA at their Annual Delegates' Meeting in 2023 regarding AAIs availability at associations' apiaries, for use by someone having an anaphylactic reaction. The outcome of the debate was inconclusive and therefore they did not support the proposition that all associations should keep AAIs at their apiaries. It was referred to the Executive Committee who were to commission a specialist professional opinion and report back. Personal communication with the BBKA (MW, January 2025) confirmed that there has been no further activity or outcome on the matter.

An education and training session was held at the Little Horsted Apiary on Saturday 5th April 2025. This was provided by Steve Rochester, Senior Resuscitation Officer at East Sussex Hospitals, and attended by more than 20 members. In addition to giving an excellent description of anaphylaxis and its treatment, he was able to answer all of the members' questions. The use of AAIs was fully covered and we were able to familiarise ourselves with, and use, the dummy pens provided.

The key take home messages regarding anaphylaxis were:

- Local reactions at the site of the sting, even if severe, are not anaphylaxis
- Anaphylaxis can present in a variety of ways and is a medical emergency
- The only treatment is with adrenaline which is given by AAIs
- Complications following the use of AAIs are not significant
- When in doubt use an AAI and call for help
- Symptoms may return or worsen after 5 minutes so be prepared to give another dose
- The anaphylactic reaction to bee stings (or any allergen) will be similar or get worse (never better) with subsequent stings.

Therefore the proposition for HWBKA is that we agree the following recommendations. In making these we have taken into account that our association apiary is in an isolated rural area, which would take an emergency ambulance many minutes to find and access.

We are recommending:

- that we require attendees to the apiary to complete a questionnaire including asking about bee sting allergies, perhaps once a year for members and each new attendee.

Where a potential attendee declares a previous severe anaphylactic episode related to bee stings, we should allow the association to decline their attendance at an event.

- Display instructions for anaphylaxis identification and treatment, including WhatThreeWords location for the emergency services, in the main hangar and also the small shed in the apiary.
- Ensure that those who have been prescribed AAIs for personal use bring 2 of them to the sessions.
- Recommend an annual anaphylaxis training session for members.
- Recommend keeping 2 AAIs on the Little Horsted Apiary premises, in a cool box in the small apiary shed during the active season, and over winter in the hangar. Include when and how to use them. A named individual member should be responsible for ensuring they are in date and correctly stored. These will need to be purchased unless we can obtain permission for a prescription from a local health provider. The cost

varies but for example, Boots on line quote £140 for 2 injectors.

Our recommendation is to have auto injectors available at the apiary, as although anaphylaxis is rare, the incidence is increasing, and we could gain vital time before an ambulance arrives at our isolated site.

References

"Should auto-injectors be freely available to beekeeping groups?" Stephen Barnes, BBA Vice Chair. BBKA News Incorporating The BBJ September 2023 p 291-293.

"Public Assessment Report of the Commission on Human Medicines' Adrenaline Auto-injector Expert Working Group: Recommendations to support the effective and safe use of adrenaline auto-injectors." Published 11 November 2021 (link here and here) .

"Understanding anaphylaxis and adrenaline auto-injectors: A conversation with Professor Adam Fox." Nov 2024 (link here).

Summary of the latest HWBKA committee meeting

The HWBKA committee met on 3 July 2025. The minutes from this meeting hasn't been made but we agreed to report on the need for new committee members since several are leaving the committee later this year.

Malcolm Wilkie's term as chairman is up and he will also leave the committee to focus on his studies. Keith Obbard is due to retire as president. Sandy Infield wants to step down from being Events Secretary.

All in all it means that there are several spots and roles in the committee that need willing members to step up and help. The more people we are to share the workload the less of a burden it is for the individual committee members.

And you actually don't need to be a committee member to help with the different activities the HWBKA are engaged in. Just say what you are interested in helping with and we will organise teams that will work on that topic and area. Contact any member in the committee (see last page for contact info) and tell us what areas you'd like to engage 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)

Dates for your calendar

Saturday July 5th
Langton Green Village Fair
Venue: Langton Green

Saturday July 12th 10am-3pm
Session 7 – Honey extraction
Venue: Horsted Green Park Apiary (open to all). ***Note: Changed day!***

Saturday July 12th
Crowfest – Crowborough Summer Fair
Venue: Eridge Field, Goldsmiths Recreation ground, Crowborough

Tuesday July 22
BBKA Basic Assessment
Venue: Horsted Green Park Apiary
Contact Peter Halford to sign up: the.hwbka+membership@gmail.com.

Wednesday July 30th @ 7.00pm
Bee Banter
Venue: Function room, Rose & Crown Pub, Mayfield.

Saturday August 2nd 11am-1pm
Session 8 Varroa control options
Venue: Horsted Green Park Apiary (open to all). ***Note: Changed day!***

Saturday August 9th
Weald On the Field, Uckfield
Luxford Field, Uckfield

Wednesday August 27th @ 7.00pm
Bee Banter
Venue: Blue Anchor, Crowborough

Saturday 13th September 10am-12pm
Session 9 – Preparing hives for Winter
Venue: Horsted Green Park Apiary (open to all).

Wednesday September 24th @ 7.00pm
Bee Banter
Venue: Function room, Rose & Crown Pub, Mayfield.

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

Wednesday October 29th @ 7.00pm
Bee Banter
Venue: Blue Anchor, Crowborough

Sunday 23rd November
HWBKA AGM and Honeyshow
Venue: Five Ashes Village Hall

Wednesday November 26th @ 7.00pm
Bee Banter
Venue: Function room, Rose & Crown Pub, Mayfield.

Saturday 3rd December
Talk by David Evans – Rational Varroa Control (ZOOM)
Sign up on the HWBKA web site

Saturday 13th December
HWBKA Christmas Do
Venue: Sandy Infields place, Black Shed Studios, Fairwarp

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

DIY – Woodpecker protection

By Peter Coxon

Isn't nature wonderful? Earlier this year I noticed an unusually large number of woodpeckers in the garden, both Green & Greater Spotted and thought 'how delightful' … until I went down to look at the hives and saw that nearly all the Polynucs had been broken into, and then of course the mice saw this as a golden opportunity too.

Three needed extensive plastic surgery, and one had to be euthanised. Prior to this I had had one small hole some 7 or 8 years ago. Given that this is a learned behaviour, I suspect they'll be at it again next winter when it gets cold and food is once again scarce.

So, I decided to have some defences at the ready and made some easily removable guards.

The damage woodpeckers can do.

They comprise 25x38mm roof batten, cheap and treated @~ £1.69 / m, then made into suitably sized frame and screwed and glued at the corners.

The frames are then used to form the cage using 13mm sq. welded & galvanised steel mesh which is simply stapled to the frames. Square mesh is better to form than hexagonal mesh. It is available in sheets or rolls from most DIYT outlets.

According to the internet 13mm is also too small for mice to get through.

All my polynucs have very heavy roofs … not strictly necessary for weather proofing of course but prettier than a brick to hold the roof on and more convenient than straps… and they match my WBCs. There's no hope for us DIY addicts!

If you make one add a mesh roof too.

HWBKA Committee 2024-2025

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)

Interim Treasurer: Steve Adams (the.hwbka+treasurer@gmail.com)

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Apiary Manager: Peter Coxon (the.hwbka+ahat@gmail.com)

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

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

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

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

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

Swarm Coordinators: Peter Coxon (the.hwbka+ahat@gmail.com) and Peter Halford (the.hwbka+membership@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 Inspectors:
Daniel Morgan (Mobile: 07500 95 43 90, email daniel.morgan@apha.gov.uk)
Helen Hadley (Mobile: 07871 320 316, email: helen.hadley@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).

HIGH WEALD BEEKEEPERS

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