ISSUE
October 2025

The Apiarist

. . .High Weald Beekeepers' Newsletter

Chairman's Chatter

By Malcolm Wilkie

My time as chairman is now coming to an end after three years. As with any organisation change occurs. I have also said I wish to hand over the organisation of the training to someone else although will still be involved. So 2025 is going to be a year of transition. Peter Coxon will be giving up his role as apiary manager at Horsted Green Park apiary and has said he now wishes to step back from this committee. Keith Obbard comes to the end of his time as President. Sandy Infield also is stepping down as events coordinator. The committee has been actively looking to replace these key figures and several people have been approached and accepted to get more involved in the work of our club. Roxanne Gould has said she is prepared to stand as chair but has made it clear that she wants the role advertised so others can stand if they so desired. Most committee members are remaining. However we are looking for others to sit on the committee perhaps as a general member with a view to taking on a future role and particularly would like newer or younger members to come forward to reinvigorate the work of the association. If there were anyone (particularly with digital experience), please put your name forward. Clubs function because of people who volunteer their time and skills so others can learn and progress. If you could commit the time to four or five meetings a year, please give this request some careful consideration and send me an email on: (mj.wilkie2014@gmail.com

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ARTICLES

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: January 2026

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

Report through the Asian hornet Watch app on your smartphone or at:

https://catch.asianhornetalert.org.uk/

or at:

www.bit.ly/asianhornetreport

Cricket Pitch Bees

By Peter Halford

A work of art – free form comb building by a swarm.

It was the day of the last fixture of the Bodle Street Green cricket team, a friendly match versus Brightling, which I believe has as much to do with plenty of refreshments as it does with batting, bowling and fielding. Ros, the scorer, telephoned to tell me that there were bees clustered on the branch of an oak tree right on the boundary. She sent me a photo and asked me if I thought they would be alright for the winter. They had obviously swarmed to the tree some time ago and, given that it would be the autumn equinox the following day, I said that I was not only surprised that they had set up home there but also that I was amazed that they had survived the recent winds and rain. I went down to the cricket ground to have a look and formulate a plan. It was obvious that I couldn't relocate them that day as stirring them up whilst the match was in progress could end in disaster.

I went home and looked at the weather forecast. It was due to be dry until the Tuesday afternoon and that gave me plenty of time to get some equipment together. I have a friend with a Landrover Defender with a substantial roof rack, and it was my plan to drive under the branch and put a sheet of muslin on top of some steps with a poly nuc on top. In my experience of swarm collection, the muslin is needed so that the bees that inevitably collect on the underside of the nuc's mesh floor can be wrapped up with the nuc before moving the bees to their new home location. As well as a nuc box I would also need six brood frames without foundation, some large rubber bands, and a good size kitchen knife.

On Tuesday afternoon I popped everything in the Landrover and drove down to the oak tree. It was the perfect height. I could drive right under the colony and, once I had put the steps on the roof, the bees were only eighteen inches above. I climbed onto the roof rack in my bee suit and was able to cut off each curtain of comb individually, securing them into the frames with the rubber bands before putting them in the nuc box. The curtains of comb were very light indeed; any stores that had probably once been stored around the brood had been used up and I doubt that the colony would have survived more than a few days longer without intervention. The bees were extremely protective of what stores were left, and coupled with my upsetting the nest they were getting very angry. Having now dealt with all the curtains of comb I retreated to let the bees calm down.

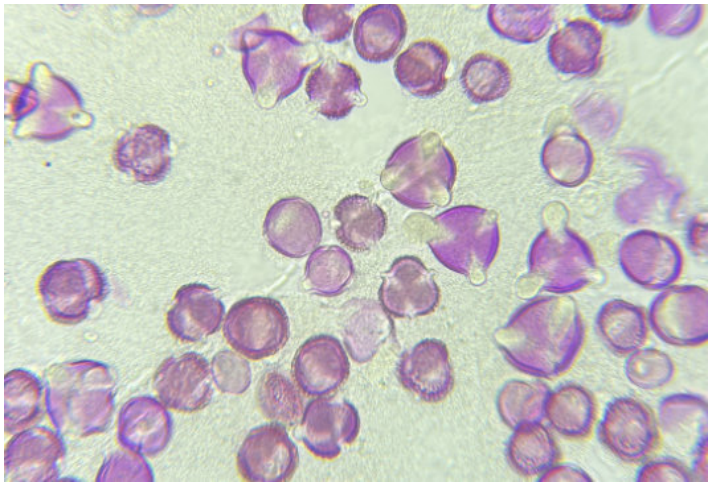
I was quite surprised how quickly some of the bees, that had initially been reticent to leave the oak branch, moved into the nuc box. When swarm collecting I often find that I have to heavily smoke the original location of the bees to mask the queen pheromone left there in order to get all the bees into the skep or nuc, but on this occasion I didn't even have to light the smoker. The day was beginning to cool down quickly and at about 5 o'clock I was able to close up the nuc, get off the Landrover roof, and go (over 3 miles) to my daughter's farm to settle the bees at their new home.

The following day I fed them sugar syrup which they wolfed down. They will have needed it both for feeding their brood and repairing and building comb. Fingers crossed that they produce good winter bees and survive until the spring.

The rescue – a caring beekeeper with suitable equipment.

Melissopalynology – easier to do than to say

By Simon Tuck, Eastbourne BKA

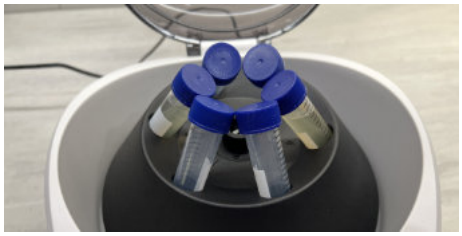


Spring honey; top fruits and holly.

Melissopalynology comes from the Greek 'mélissa' meaning bee and palynology which is "the branch of science that deals with the structure and dispersal of pollen grains and other organic objects of a similar microscopic size, considered as indicators of plant taxonomy and distribution". While palynology can involve the study of archeological and even forensic pollen involvement, ours is just that which is found in honey.

It's of interest to all beekeepers I think, to know where our bees forage. We are, after all "landless farmers". Looking at pollen samples taken from the hind legs of returning bees (covered in the May issue) can tell us much, but only in relation to pollen collection. Honey bee foragers collect pollen or nectar; less frequently (~17%) they collect both. When visiting a flower, depending on the structure, which we'll come back to, a forager will use its highly adapted proboscis to take up the secretions from the nectaries and in doing so may allow some mixing of pollen with the nectar. This nectar is then taken directly back to the hive with no visits to other forage sources - it remains largely uncontaminated. Once in the hive it is passed to a nectar processing bee who unloads the foraging bees honey crop contents and performs a series of water reduction manoeuvres. All of this allows pollen grains to enter the nectar and finally when it is stored, other nectar is added to it which may come from other sources. The beekeeper then extracts the honey from a frame which may also contain cells of pollen or beebread and the spinning at high speed may mix the contents resulting in the honey which ends up in jars. What I'm getting at is the pollen found in honey can be very mixed and is unlikely to indicate a mono-floral honey, although in some cases it sometimes does. You have to bear this in mind when you study it. The second point is many pollens are very similar (most are around the same size and a similar shape). It takes years to confidently ID pollens but starting with reference slides, as I've mentioned before, helps. Looking down a compound microscope at the contents of your honey is certainly an interesting way to spend a winter's evening and many an hour can fly by with your Rex Sawyer by your side!

Mix your 10g of honey with 20g of water until it is fully dissolved. Adding a little gentle heat helps the process



Add your tubes to the centrifuge so that the drum is balanced. If you include more than one sample don't mix them up!

All you need is some simple kit*, your compound microscope and a desk centrifuge (you can do it successfully without one, but it takes a few days rather than minutes and if you forget about it, your sample will ferment!).

• Take a glass beaker (or similar) and with accurate scales weigh out exactly 10g of honey. Runny honey is best and I've found issues with redissolving set honey which seems to lose pollen grains in the process).

• Add 20g (equal to exactly 20mL) of clean water.

• Heat gently on the hot plate stirring with a glass rod until the honey is fully dissolved.

• Pour 15g into a suitable centrifuge tube as accurately as you can (a test tube holder really helps)

• Pour another 15g in another tube so they are balanced in the centrifuge

• Centrifuge both tubes opposite each other at 2,500 rpm for 10 minutes. You can run two more samples as most centrifuges hold 6 tubes but you'll need to label them all and not mix them up.

• Once you remove them from the centrifuge one at a time you must do so really carefully as the sediment will be sitting at the 'crook' of the tube on the upper side. Not at the tube tip, contrary to popular belief. Turn the tube 180° and in one gentle but continuous movement pour out the entire contents from the first tube. The pollen should stay where it was although you probably won't be able to see it.

• Do the same with the other tube but only pour out half the liquid. Swirl the tube with the liquid that remains to mix up the pollen again.

• Pour all of this into the first (empty) tube. Swirl this around too. You now have ALL your pollen in one tube. Mark it.

• Add water so that this tube now has 15g of water in exactly.

• Add clean water to the other tube so it also weighs exactly 15g

• Centrifuge them, again opposite, at 2,500 rpm for 10 minutes

• Now you might be able to see that pollen sediment, but if you can't make sure you use the right tube and again gently but confidently pour out all the liquid (called the supernatant). Every last drop.

• Now suck up a tiny quantity – just a single drop – of water in your pasteur pipette and add it to the bottom of the tube with pollen in.

• Flush the pollen sediment with the water and do so until it's all been dispersed into your drop of clean water.

• Now suck it up and transfer it to a very clean microscope slide

• Add a cube of fuchsin/glycerin stain

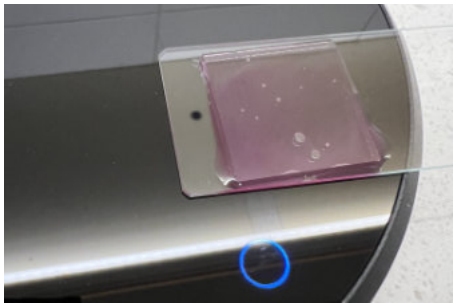
• Heat gently (at the edge) of the hot plate on the blue (cool) setting

• The stain will melt and mix with the still liquid drop of water/pollen

• While liquid add a warm coverslip and lower it gently with tweezers, Use a needle to rest one edge of the coverslip on so that when you lower it you can take the needle out and this avoids trapping any air bubbles. If you get a few bubbles it's not the end of the world. Some practise will help.

• Keep the slide heating very gently for 5 minutes so that the pollen grains take up the stain and swell.

• Now you are ready to look at your slide under the microscope at x400 magnification. That's x40 on the objective lens and x10 on the eyepiece lens. Remember, these multiply together to give your overall magnification.

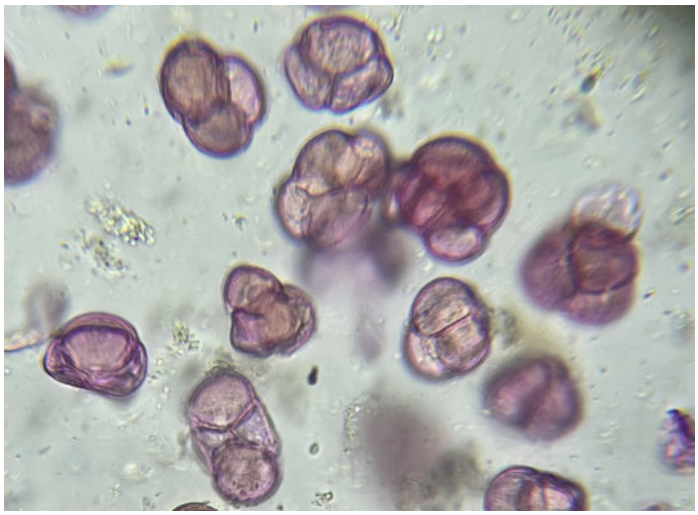


Your final sample now stained with fuchsin-glycerine and gently heated

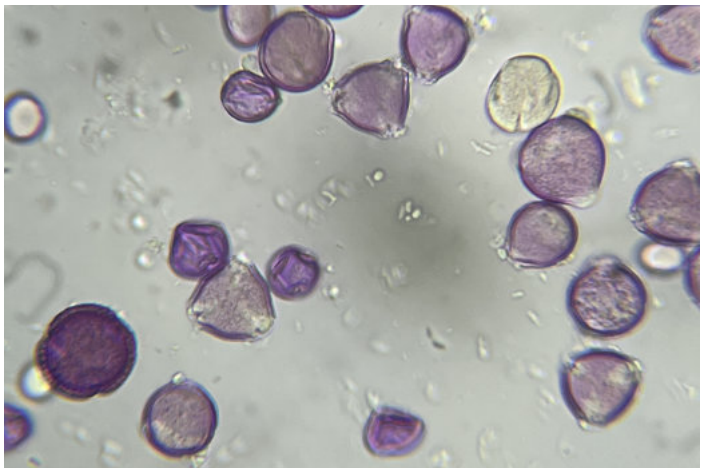
• Get your Rex Sawyer book out and start to look up what you see. There are excellent pictures and you will start to spot the different plant families and different features to help your ID. Don't get too overwhelmed by what you see. Sometimes it's a huge mass of pollen grains all on top of each other. Other times you really have to search for them. You may see some sugar crystals which are regular shaped angular objects. This might indicate adulteration but isn't conclusive.

• You will, very quickly, be hooked!

Included are a few of my favourites – my own photos.



Confirming Waitrose Scottish Heather Honey is in fact ling heather!



Typical summer honey - bramble, red and white clover.

There is just one last thing to say about pollen in honey. The honey bee has a very unique mechanism to stop it from digesting the nectar it needs to take back to the hive. When it needs to extract pollen from the nectar in the honey stomach it 'gulps' it with an organ known as the proventriculus. This is a lipped organ with backward facing hairs. When it 'gulps', it allows the nectar to extrude through the hairs but it keeps the pollen grains held so that they can pass further along the alimentary canal for digestion to take place. The nectar is returned to the crop and goes back to the hive. This filtering process is more likely to trap large pollens than small pollens, thus small pollens found in honey are said to be overrepresented and large pollens said to be underrepresented. Sadly you can't just count the number of grains you find and assume these ratios give you the source ratios of your honey. You have to do a bit of clever maths to work out the actual ratios. Interestingly therefore, if you see just a few lime pollen grains you are probably looking at a monofloral lime honey. Lime pollens are very underrepresented. It's also to do with the flower structure and how close the anthers are to the nectaries. Lime nectar is secreted from the inner surface of the sepals which are a long way from the anthers.

*HWBKA has microscopes members can to borrow. We have a centrifuge as well but it is not for loan, but for our workshops in microscopy.

The Queen with Nine Lives
– A Comedy of Introduction Errors

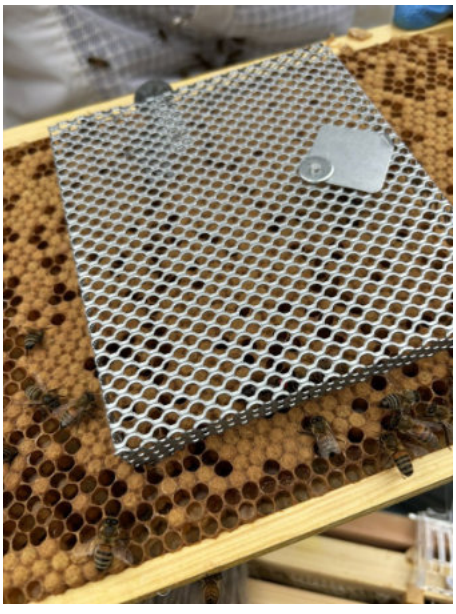
Paul Sutton, Eastbourne BKA

I believe it was Henry Ford who said, "The only real mistake is the one from which we learn nothing." and beekeeping is journey with many detours from which we can learn to improve our own practice. If we share our mistakes, we can learn from each other and accelerate that journey. This is the spirit in which I offer the following experience of introducing a mated queen into a colony!

Recently, I had the privilege—and pressure—of introducing a very special Roger Patterson queen, kindly passed on by Simon Tuck. This queen exhibited hygienic behaviour and was too valuable to risk. I approached her introduction with a mixture of confidence (I usually nail this) and increasing desperation as things began to unravel.

On queen introduction, Dave Cushman and Roger Patterson say

> " ... you can have two colonies in the same condition, in the same apiary, on the same day and if you introduce a queen in the same condition into each, one will succeed and the other will fail. If they were two separate colonies belonging to two separate beekeepers one would say the method works, the other would say it doesn't."



Quintrex press-in queen cage

Clearly there are many variables in introducing a queen and this sort of experience contributes to the adage that there are as many methods as there are beekeepers. (For those starting their beekeeping journey who find this sort of situation frustrating, as a general rule, it is helpful to understand one method and master it).

Spotting balling behaviour and doing something about it is key.

The Background: A "Queenless" Setup

I'd kept a colony queenless in an 11-frame hive, using test frames and knocking back queen cells. I split it into two nucs, moved them to my garden, and introduced two queens (one from an apidea and The Special One) in Butler cages. Two days later, I removed the fondant plugs and waited.

Life 1: Balling Begins

Apidea queen? Accepted.

I opened the second nuc with what I am now calling 'Her Royal Resilience' and noticed a clump of bees. Yes, she was in the process of being balled by around 20 bees which I literally had to pull off her. Dave Cushman points out that the clump of bees will tighten around the queen if the beekeeper tries to separate them and this is what happened. *(If you have water to hand, it is better to dunk the whole clump into water to separate them)*

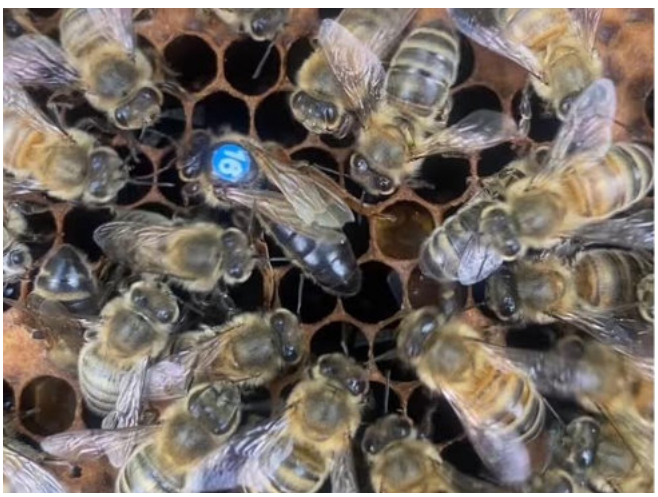
Life 2: Escape Artist

Believing I had saved her from certain death, I decided to cage her and think again. As I went to pick her up, she flew off vertically over my shoulder. Given that she was mated elsewhere, had been in a cage in a nuc for 2 days in a strange location, I thought there wasn't much chance of her returning to the colony that was trying to kill her.

I sat there for 20 mins wondering what to tell Simon, with the nuc open and the frame of emerging brood out, in the forlorn hope she may return. *(I have had 4 queens fly off in my beekeeping experience and all have returned so don't panic if this happens to you!)* Then, 20 mins in, I saw her land on the tree stump the nuc was on. I grabbed her and stuck her in the cage!

Life 3: Minty Rejection

I dunked the cage in dissolved glacier mint (a Simon trick), checked for any remaining QCs or rogue queens, and did a controlled release two days later. Still some bees were chasing



Spotting balling behaviour and doing something about it is key.

and attempting to sting her. Back in the cage she went.

Life 4: Press-In Cage & More Aggression

I tried a press-in cage over some capped brood. After three days, some feeding behaviour looked promising. Controlled release again — and while some bees were fine, a few were still aggressive. Simon confirmed via video: abort.

Life 5: Starting Fresh with Young Bees

The problem, I realised, was as Dave Cushman says "Old bees, long queenless, are liable to ball a new queen on introduction". So I made a fresh nuc from another colony — capped brood and shaken nurse bees only. I moved the nuc multiple times to let older bees fly off until the capped frame was covered in young, fluffy bees.

Her Royal Resilience went in one more time via Butler cage. After a two-day wait, I did a final controlled release. This time: no aggression. Just calm, purposeful bees and a very relieved beekeeper.

As I write, she's four days into a peaceful, undisturbed 10-day period. Fingers crossed, she's laying soon and enjoying her fifth (and hopefully final) life in her new colony.

Editorial footnote: ***Queen introduction is not an exact science.***

There is no denying there is an element of 'hit and miss' when it comes to introducing queens but there are a number of things you can do to stack the odds in your favour. Firstly, always start with a small colony; make up a nuc specifically if you need to. Secondly there are two windows of opportunity. The first is 6-10 hours of being made queenless and the second is 9 days later, when you have destroyed any queen cells. Very early or very late in the season is good and definitely not when robbing is rife.

Summary of the latest HWBKA committee meetings

The HWBKA committee met on 3 July 2025. 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 functions 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.

This is job descriptions for some of the committee roles that needs to be filled:

Honorary President; The Honorary President is a figure head member of the HWBKA, providing support, direction and informal council to the committee members and representing the association to the general public.

Appointment; The Honorary President is proposed by the committee for a 3 year term and elected by the members at the AGM.

Key tasks;

• Attending the majority of committee meetings to provide support, advice and guidance.

• Act as the public face of the club at events, meetings, and in communications.

• Promote the club's activities and mission to attract new members.

• Take the Chair at the AGM when the Committee retires and conducts the election of the new Chairman.

• Present prizes at the Honey Show.

• As one of the Public Facing members, deal with website requests from the general public.

• Represent the Association when required at Civic Functions or similar events.

Committee Chairperson; The Committee Chairperson plays a central leadership role in the Association, guiding the committee's work, facilitating meetings, and ensuring the club operates smoothly and in line with its aims and constitution.

Appointment; The Committee Chairperson is proposed by the committee for a 3 year term and elected by the members at the AGM.

Key tasks;

• Lead the club's committee, ensuring effective teamwork and communication.

• Chair committee meetings, set agendas, and ensure decisions are actioned.

• Support committee members in fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

• Support recruitment and retention of members and volunteers.

• Act as a key point of contact for club members, encouraging participation and feedback.

• Oversee the development of club policies, plans, and annual goals.

• Represent the Association when required at Civic Functions or similar events.

• Represent HWBKA at SBKA meetings and events.

Treasurer; The Treasurer is a key member of the committee and manages the association's funds by handling financial records, and reporting on the financial position to the committee and members.
Appointment; The Treasurer is proposed by the committee for a 3 year term and elected by the members at the AGM.

Key tasks;

• Communicates with HWBKA Bank(s) for both current & savings accounts. Liaising with the bank on any issues arising from the accounts.

• Reconcile accounts with income & expenditure.

• Liaise with the Membership Secretary to check on membership payments & amounts that have been paid.

• Liaise with the Membership Secretary re BBKA allocations & BDI payments to affect insurance for both the members & association.

• Manage Cardnet card Payment service at events & arranging for the use of the Cardnet machine by the event organisers

• Reporting to the Committee on the financial status of the club when required.

• Preparing & providing a financial report to the Membership at the AGM.

• Assist the Chairperson and other committee members with administrative tasks.

Apiary Manager; The Apiary Manager is a member of the committee and is responsible for overseeing the care, maintenance, and productivity of the club's apiary. This role ensures the health and wellbeing of the bees, manages hive inspections, and supports educational opportunities for club members and the wider community.
Appointment; The Apiary Manager is approved and appointed by the committee for an indefinite period.
Key tasks;

• Provide regular updates to the committee on hive numbers and status and apiary requirements including annual budget.

• Carry out regular inspections of the colonies, possibly weekly from the end of March till September to monitor bee health, swarm control etc.

• ensure the site is regularly maintained and safe including health and safety compliance, maintenance of association equipment, servicing cleaning HWBKA area in the barn and toilet facilities.

• Maintain sufficient resources to facilitate running colonies and honey extraction/bottling.

• Organise honey extraction for the beginner's course and others when necessary, in conjunction with Training Manager.

• Co-ordinate sales of Associations honey.

• Assist Training Manager with Training days when required

• Organise work parties involving wider membership to assist with any of the above.

• Recruit an Apiary Assistant if required

Events Secretary; The Events Secretary is a key member of the HWBKA, responsible for organising and coordinating educational, social, and committee events that promote the association and support the members. This role ensures that events run smoothly and contribute to the Associations practices.
Appointment; The Events Secretary is approved and appointed by the committee for an indefinite period.
Key tasks;

• Make a yearly calendar each year with events, fairs and meetings usually done early in the year having had the first committee meeting where events and fairs will be on the agenda updating records and storing them in line with data protection legislation

• Apply to be at Fairs e.g. Crowborough Summer Fair, Uckfield Weald in the field. this involves contacting the organisers, compiling paperwork (risk assessments, insurance), and completing application. Making sure that entry fees are paid through treasurer and ordering supplies and equipment.

• Early in the year make an event's 'Cheat Sheet.' Listing event, coordinator of the event, volunteers who have committed to help with contact details, all necessary equipment required including card reader. This can involves going to Beebanter and canvassing people to help

• Book Pubs for the monthly Beebanter meetings.

• Booking venues for the committee meetings.

• Booking a Village Hall for workshops & AGM / Honey Show. This involves filling in an application form, submitting to the treasurer for payment. It is important to do this as early as possible because the hall gets booked up.

• Organise the summer BBQ/Picnic. Coordinating, venue, helpers, equipment, food, drink. Promoting via Website and emailing/calling members. Compiling a list of attendees and distributing event details.

• Organise the annual 'Wax Worksop'.

• Organise the Christmas Social Event. This involves booking a pub or venue Promoting the event, compile a list of participants, taking payment and paying venue, caterers etc.

The committee also met on 2 October, and among the announcements was that Mark Wilcox has been awarded the certificate for the BBKA Module 3 "Honeybee Diseases, Pests and Poisoning".

The new system to borrow books from the HWBKA library is almost ready to launch. At the AGM we will demonstrate how you can borrow a book online.

Much of the meeting was about the succession of key roles in the committee. The role of chairman is preferably to be held by a person who has already worked in the committee and know the procedures.

Fortunately some members have have agreed to join the committee and help fill the gaps, but there is room for more. You are welcome to contact any member in the committee (see last page for contact info) and tell us what areas you would 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

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.

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)

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

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.