

Brighton & Lewes Beekeepers



A DIVISION OF THE SUSSEX BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

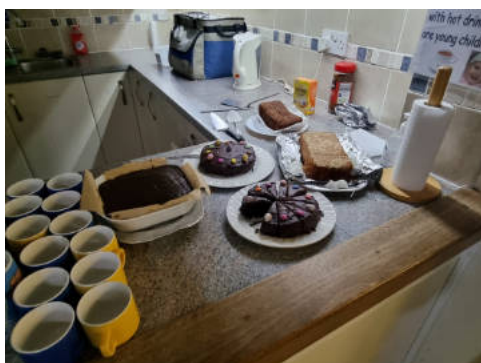
NEWSLETTER APRIL 2025

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EDITORIAL



There's a lot of unsung work that goes into making B&L the organisation that it is, and some of the informal elements aren't seen by everyone.

So here's a shout-out to the wonderful array of cakes made by Mim, Jude, Heidi and others for our penultimate 2024/25 winter meeting. On top of a fascinating

talk by Stephen Fleming on the weird and wonderful world of drone congregation areas, we enjoyed a veritable smorgasbord of sticky stuff, with tea concocted by Ross, our host with the mostest, to wash it all down. Thank you all. What are we going to do at our summer out-apiary meetings...?

A full account of that meeting is inside, along with a checklist in our seasonal tips column of things to do on your first hive inspection of the season, which must surely happen this month.

You'll also find the agenda for B&L's educational programme based around our four teaching apiaries, as well as advance notice of a fun day out, cleaning frames (yes, really!). Enjoy your season!

Manek Dubash, Editor

Winter meetings

Date	Topic
Wednesday 16 April	The special language of bees, by Margaret Murdin

All meetings are LIVE and start at 19.15 for 19.30 at Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Lewes BN7 2LR
Next Bee Chat: see social media

Spring/summer meetings

Date	Event	Location
Saturday 17 May	Sussex BKA Bee Market	Uckfield College
Sunday 22 June	Out-apiary meeting with Jeff Rodrigues	Rottingdean Apiary

Other events will be added as we get nearer the time. The season starts here!

EVENTS

- Biggest meeting of 2025
- The first inspection
- Frame-cleaning a go-go!
- See back page for details

NEXT MONTH

- Seasonal hints and tips
- Asian hornet update
- News news news!
- Latest events
- Meetings & more

SHARE YOUR PHOTOS & STORIES

Do you have interesting photos or video links you'd like to share? Or an insight from your beekeeping that would could enhance the hobby for others? Do you have skills that could be useful to other members? Anything else you'd like to see in this newsletter?

Ideas and contributions welcome; all contact details are on the back page.

ONLINE

-  [B&L website](#)
-  [Facebook group](#)



QR link to B&L website

Notes from the Chair



Manek Dubash
Chairman

The last month has been tense with anticipation: at the last open meeting, led by the enthusiastic Nigel Kermode, the chat over tea and cakes that followed Stephen Fleming's excellent talk on drone congregation areas, was dominated by the urge to get stuck into our bees.

Some intrepid individuals had already inspected, though this was understandably driven more by necessity than the need to check on our charges. At the time, the weather wasn't there—but as you read this, I'd expect you'll have conducted your first inspection. I hope it went well.

That said, I hope you've not been as negligent as I have (shame on me!) with respect to cleaning and preparing your equipment for the coming season. Prevaricator that I am, I shall probably leave it to the last moment.

News from Sussex

One of the highlights of the last month was the Sussex Beekeepers Association AGM. Every year, each of the five Sussex division reports on the main events of the last 12 months. What struck me was that each division is doing more or less the same things, as you might expect, but doing it slightly differently. So we could have lots to learn from other divisions about how to get better at what we do, and maybe even vice versa.

To that end, I've proposed that there be an occasional meeting with the heads of other divisions to share info, essentially, and do more learning from each other. I'm hoping something good comes out of this.

And there was also an excellent talk from Martin Smith on managing your colony numbers: do you have that problem?

Asian Hornet report



Rachel Ramaker
Asian Hornet Team
Co-ordinator



Welcome to my first report as Asian hornet or Yellow-legged hornet coordinator for our division. In this report you will find some updates on the national picture, information about what is happening in our area and some advice on monitoring stations if you are taking part in regional monitoring.

Last month, I attended a meeting for our region for all coordinators. Nigel Semmence [National Bee Unit] updated us with the numbers from last year. It was not a good year for the Asian hornet and the 2024 spring trapping had been very successful. Of all 2024 nests, only the nests in the Four Oaks area were from queens that had overwintered. They were all related to

2023 Four Oaks nest and stayed relatively close to the original location.

Of all nests found last year, only seven are deemed high risk due to the presence of viable queens. These locations will be monitored by the NBU this spring. Our closed location is Bexhill. Another nest was deemed medium risk, this location will be monitored by beekeepers in Southampton.

At the meeting Martin Smith demonstrated the eR2 software that allows coordinators to allocate squares for monitoring to volunteers. The big message was that trapping should only happen in high-risk areas, as trapping poses a big threat to other insects and pollinators, especially to our European hornet.

Hornet monitoring in our area

I have started to add monitors to our local map. I am looking for more monitors, especially in seaside locations. At the end of April and at the end of May, we will do a week-long trapping exercise. (Seaside locations may do continuous trapping to monitor queens flying in from France or coming in on boats).

more overleaf...

Asian Hornet report (continued)

This will help us prepare for a future situation when there is a positive Asian hornet sighting.

What to do next

In order to join you will need to do the following:

- You need to have a trap that doesn't drown insects. You could use a wick pot (small jar with hole in the lid and a jay cloth strip as a wick) or a sponge in the liquid bait.
- You will need to add holes near the bottom to let by-catch out; an Asian hornet can get through a 7.8mm hole so it needs to be smaller than that. You will need to be able to check the trap frequently to let bigger by-catch out.
- For bait: mix a cup of undiluted

blackcurrant cordial with half a litre of dark beer. There are other recipes to be found on the internet.

- [Email](#) or text me your [What Three Words](#) location (Google to find out how) of your trap. I also need your email address. You will receive a link to your monitoring map within a week. Please bookmark this site.

When you follow the link, you can find your square and click on it. You must select paused monitoring until the training exercise weeks. I will e-mail monitors with the details of our training weeks.

Last of all, [here is a link](#) (or use the QR code below) to the training exercise the BBKA set up a few years ago. Although this exercise is no longer needed for insurance purposes,

it is a great way to learn to recognise the Asian or yellow-legged hornet.

A 2025 study revealed that researchers identified around 1,449 different species in the guts of Asian hornet larvae, demonstrating a broader diet than previously thought. These include flies, beetles, butterflies, moths, and even spiders, with honeybees being a key target.

Thank you for your support!

Rachel Ramaker
Asian Hornet Team Co-ordinator



Seasonal tips for April

The first inspection

At last, the first full inspection of the year! You may have been able to inspect in late March, but don't forget the rule of thumb about opening the hive: it should be warm enough to go out in shirt sleeves. So, usually you'd wait for a dry day of about 15°C or more with only a light wind.

Early in the year, it matters less what time of day you inspect, but later in the year it's best to inspect around midday when most of the adult bees are out foraging.

Experienced beekeepers have done this all before but it's worth thinking about before you get elbow-deep in your hive; you need a plan. Just take a few moments to think about why you are inspecting and what you might need—and what you might find.

Why inspect?

The queen: you want to find the queen. I know this is difficult, but it is a skill you need to learn, and learn fast. If you're lucky, she has a big spot of colour on the back of her thorax. However, the old queen may have

been superseded in the late autumn and have no marking; so, what to do?

Scan each side of frame as it's removed; start on the edges and then zigzag across the face of the comb. The queen is bigger by at least half than any other bee in the hive at this time of year, she has a longer abdomen and has brown legs. If you fail to see her, don't despair, it will come with time. Your second option to knowing if the queen is present is to see if there is brood in all stages; eggs, larvae, and sealed cells.

If these are all present, then she's in there somewhere. Note; if you see multiple eggs in one cell then this is a



A lovely but unmarked queen

sign that there may be a laying worker present in the hive and no queen.

Disease: the new beekeeper can't be expected to be able to identify all the diseases that affect bees, but they should know how to spot that something is not right. Healthy larvae should be pearly white, shiny and have clear segmentation, lying in the bottom of the cell in a tight 'C' shape. Sealed worker cells should be biscuit-coloured (because the wax seal has been mixed with pollen to make it air permeable) and should have no noticeable holes in them. Any capped drone cells present will look similar but will be domed due to the egg being laid in a worker cell and not a cell made for drones.

If the brood pattern is any different, or there is a strange smell coming off the comb; sometimes likened to the smell of Copydex glue, then quickly seek help from your mentor or the bee inspector—see back page for contact details.

Space: It's still important to ensure there is enough space for the queen to lay. With early flowering trees and

Seasonal tips for April (continued)

flowers in bloom, the workers need to be able to store this nectar without taking up the space the queen needs.

When the colony has expanded so that it covers both sides of about 6-8 frames, put a super on. If this is filled with new foundation it may be better to omit the queen excluder until they have started to draw out the comb.

Stores: the colony needs to be able to support itself during this period and will need about 3-4kg of stores.

A full brood frame will contain about 2-2.5kg so you will have to estimate the amount of stores distributed through the hive.

Hopefully, with a good tide and a following wind the weather will stay good, and by the end of the month there should be enough forage to see them start laying down honey for the first harvest in late June.

Opening the hive

All the literature suggests that you puff a little smoke (they're not beagles) at the entrance and wait for a minute or so before lifting the lid of the hive. The rationale is that the bees think the hive is in danger from a forest fire and, in preparation for evacuation, they load up on honey which makes them less annoyed.

Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. The next technique the new beekeeper must learn is how to open the hive and remove frames in a quick, efficient manner but without any sudden movements or cracking of stuck components. Here's how.

Lift the lid off the hive and place it upside down on the ground or a spare stand (it saves you bending). Gently insert the chisel end of your hive tool at a shallow angle into the joint between the crown board and the top



Smoking calms the bees—sometimes

of the brood box. Work your tool all the way around the joint until the crown board comes off. Try to avoid the crack as the propolis seal gives way.

Check the underside of the board to make sure the queen is not sitting on it; it's unlikely but bees don't read books.



Sting-proof suit—Sentinel II

What do you need?

Personal equipment

Bee suit/jacket: Do you know how to put it on so it is bee-proof? Check the seals around the sleeves and legs/ bottom of jacket. Check the zip closers on the veil.

Gloves: It is better to use disposable gloves, either latex, or my choice, long-cuffed nitriles. You can use ordinary washing-up gloves: rinse them in a washing soda solution between inspections. Long-sleeved 'hazmat' gloves are too thick for delicate manipulations and the leather type could be vector for disease as they are seldom cleaned regularly.

Boots: Either Wellingtons or rigger type are OK, as you can tuck your suit legs or trousers into them. Bees tend not to crawl down, so always tuck loose ends into the top of the boots or into the top of gloves.

Smoker: Any type is OK. Warning: do not try to light it with your veil on, at best you could melt the veil; at worst, if it catches alight you will be in all sorts of trouble. Make sure you know

how to light the smoker and are able to keep it alight. Don't use matches unless you're a Boy Scout. I use a plumber's blowtorch, but others have been known to use crème brûlée torches.

What about fuel? It's probably best just to use old egg boxes or shredded cardboard from your favourite delivery company, but as you progress there are other solutions to smoker fuel. My preference is chipped wood from any tree surgeon; dried, it burns for ages.

Hive tool: These are many and various but start with the standard 'J' type which will do almost everything you want.

Hive equipment

Keep to hand a selection of hive parts as you may want to replace damaged items as you find them. If nothing else, make a note of the bits that need changing.

I usually take this opportunity to replace the floor, boxes, crown board and roof as the accumulation of propolis and wax over the winter will make any later inspection harder.

Seasonal tips for April (continued)

Place the crown board on the roof so the corners are diagonally opposite to those of the roof.

Now, give another little puff of smoke into the hive. Working from one end/side of the brood box, gently prise the first frame/dummy board away from its neighbour.

When both sides have been freed, keeping your hive tool in your hand, lift the frame/dummy board vertically out of the brood box using the lugs on each end of the frame.

Check to see if the queen is on that frame. If not, place it in front of the hive or in a frame holder. Repeat with the next frame but, after inspecting it, place it in the gap left by the first frame/dummy board. Repeat all the way through the hive, maintaining the

gap as you go.

Once you have inspected every frame and noted the condition of the brood and stores level (and found the queen), slide the frames back into their original position. This can be done all together, in groups or one at a time, but the fewer movements the better as you are less likely to damage the bees, especially the queen.

Replace the first frame/dummy board and rebuild the hive.

Finishing up

Just a few more jobs:

- Record what you have seen. Chances are you'll have forgotten what you did or saw by the next inspection. You can devise your own record card or there are plenty available on

the web.

- To avoid attracting rats and mice and reducing the chances of spreading disease, you need to clean up the apiary, collecting debris removed from the hive by disposing of it in the bin or burning it.
- Clean any components you replaced; don't leave them to later, as later never comes and you end up with an annoying pile by the end of the year.
- Clean your hive tool and gloves in a solution of washing soda. Wash your bee suit.

And so the season begins. Next time: queen cells and swarm prevention.

The Veiled Beekeeper

Apiary Reports

Grassroots (part 1)

I made wax while the sun shone today. The hive which died out in December was removed from its stand this week and brought home for rendering.

Wax moth hadn't taken hold but there was a lot of dark comb.

I was interested in the look of the

cocoons remaining after rendering.

The steamer has cleaned the frames and produced honey, water and wax for exchange for new foundation.

I have burned frames I don't want to reuse in the incinerator in my garden, it does leave a sticky waxy mess which

is of interest to slugs, and sometimes bees and wasps earlier in the season.

Don't forget to save wax capping separately from brace comb and any random rendered wax because it can't be used for wax wraps, exhibition candles or wax blocks.



Apiary Reports

Grassroots (part 2)

This was the first day that I could check on the bees for about 10 days. I knew that they had all been topped up with fondant and they would be eating through it because I can tell the colonies are getting bigger.

I took a picture of the thermometer, it was around or just about 15 degrees, and the flowering currant at the entrance to the apiary was also breaking into flower with the blackthorn in the hedge surrounding the hives.

I looked at the colonies, two were on the outsides of the hives and looking very busy. On inspection the busiest had brace comb under the crown board and the fondant from last week had gone. I looked in the shallow frames and found sealed brood and



sealed drone comb. I put the queen excluder on and a super with a mix of drawn comb and foundation.

I looked at the wooden hives—when I removed the crown board, the fondant was eaten, and the queen was walking around with a red dot on her back. I went to the shed to get something to pop her into so that I could put the queen excluder and a super on, but she had disappeared! She is now under the queen excluder (fingers crossed) with a super which has some stores and a super of drawn comb, she should be fine for a couple of weeks.

A colony which had seemed very strong all the way through the winter seems to have queen issues. The entrance to the hive was not very active. She was a green queen, there was a small, open queen cell on one frame which may have been a failed supersedure. There was no evidence of disease or starvation, and still about three frames of bees, so she might have failed or died about two or three weeks ago. It was just not possible to look inside until today to find out what was going on. Before I opened the hive, I wondered if they had already died out.

When I swapped in the new open mesh floor, there were about half a floor of dead bees, no eggs or brood in the brood frames. I put this colony into a six-frame nuc with some fondant. It is not going to be possible to change the situation with that colony.

When I go back at the weekend, I am thinking that I will shake the bees out, so that they can beg entry into another hive and find a new home.

*Jude New, Apiary Manager
Photos by Jude*



Treatment-free beekeeping

There is a growing interest in treatment-free beekeeping. I've listened to Prof Stephen Martin who has studied these things for the past 20 years worldwide. I've read Steve Riley's book (from Westerham BKA and mentored by Prof Martin).

Sussex Beekeeping Association has a guest speaker talking about this very thing. When I first heard of it it didn't impress me much (as Shania Twain would say).

But varroa treatments are expensive, and resistance to some

treatments has to lead to more research.

If done with caution, treatment-free beekeeping can lead to higher honey yields.

When varroa moved around the world the developing countries couldn't afford treatments—so they never used them and now bees in Africa, South America and India are still treatment-free, as their bees have developed a resistance to varroa.

So I am beginning to think of putting my toe in the water.

Please note: the opinions expressed here are mine and are not necessarily endorsed by Brighton and Lewes Division.

The article in the BIBBA monthly (link below) is by Steve McGrath, the speaker at the Bee Market is Steve Riley—any Steves in Brighton and Lewes Division interested??

<https://bibba.com/march-2025-bibba-monthly/>

Jude New

Drone congregation areas by Stephen Fleming: report



After February's AGM and Honey Show, we promised a grand finale to the Winter Meeting programme. Our plan is to close out with "Sex and Drugs and Rock 'n Roll" and we began this theme with a talk on 19 March by BeeCraft co-editor and experienced beekeeper Stephen Fleming (above). It is really encouraging to note that with 43 members attending, this is the highest turnout we have had this season and reflects a really positive growth trend.

Stephen is a highly acknowledged speaker in the beekeeping world and we were fortunate to have him drive up to Lewes from Hampshire to talk to us. His particular expertise is on drone congregation areas (DCAs).

So while humans have bars and nightclubs etc, the honey bee equivalent of these mating areas is a DCA. But why would the queen take a risky mating flight versus for example, the drones coming to visit her in the hive? This was probably an evolution from early wasps, and results in a virgin queen leaving the hive on 3-4 mating flights and mating with 15-20 drones to create the genetic diversity necessary for survival.

He showed a film which demonstrated the mating process, ending of course in the death of the drone. They really do have only one purpose in life...

The idea of drone congregation areas was first mentioned by 18-century naturalist Gilbert White. He wrote about walking on Selborne Common and the constant hum of bees at certain times of the year, yet without seeing where it came from. Today, this area can still be identified as a DCA.

Stephen outlined the work needed to detect DCAs, arguing strongly that it is a perfect hobby, since it involves being out in the countryside with great views and good weather!

Essentially the topographical characteristics are usually an open area free of obstructions, usually on top of a hill. The climatic aspects are a high temperature, high light intensity and good thermals.

DCA discovery

The technique is essentially an attractant mounted on a four-metre pole. The attractant consists of synthetic 9-ODA, the queen pheromone emitted on a mating flight, or sometimes a queen in a cage.

Another technique is an unmanned aerial vehicle (a drone—not a bee).

DCAs can be very localised, so by walking a few metres Stephen could find either many drones around the attractant or none at all.

Studies on the Scilly Isles—his so-called 'Game of Drones' research—searched the islands for DCAs. By marking drones, he was able to see whether drones island-hop which, to some extent, they do.

Questions from the floor ranged from the height of DCAs through to the number of drones present in the DCA which can range from 100 to several thousand. And as technology improves, we will be able to track and plot individual drones and queens as they mate.

This was this season's first meeting



Training Co-ordinator Jude hands Bob Curtis his Microscopy Certificate



held with an external speaker and represents a big investment for B&L—it did not disappoint.

Awards and thanks

One of the real pleasures of meeting over the winter is that we can make awards to those that are furthering their beekeeping expertise with formal qualifications. So it was that our Training Co-ordinator, Jude, presented Bob Curtis (below) with his Microscopy Certificate, for having passed this qualification recently. Well done Bob!

Finally, many thanks to all those who attended, we continue to break attendance records. Perhaps it was the terrific speaker, or perhaps the excellent catering.

Either way, a big thanks go to Ross for manning the kitchen and Mim, Steve, Heidi and Jude for all the cakes. Let's be honest, it was hard to choose which cake to go for 😊

Sex, drugs & rock 'n' roll

So, we continue the 'sex, drugs and rock 'n' roll' theme to the last winter meeting of this season. This time it will be 'drugs', when Margaret Murdin will talk to us on 'The special language of bees' which may involve a few pheromones!

So please come along to our last meeting at Eastgate Baptist Hall on Wednesday 16 April at 19.30. This will close out the Winter Season and it is the dearest wish of the committee that, thanks to this programme, you can all Rock 'n Roll into the 2025 beekeeping year!

Nigel Kermode

Photos: Manek Dubash

Agenda: apiary meetings for 2025



Rottingdean apiary.
Photo: Graham Bubloz

The teaching apiaries—currently Grassroots, Hove and Rottingdean, with Barcombe to follow later—will be opening for summer meetings for general inspections, demonstrations of manipulations you can copy and use in your own apiaries and question and answer sessions.

We will review the programme in September to see if we have improved attendance and achieved our goal of providing support for all the members especially those who are following a course.

New for 2025

Last year the B&L committee was worried the apiaries were not attracting many visitors. We plan to change this:

- Each apiary has its own WhatsApp group, which is managed by Adrien at Hove, Jeff at Rottingdean, Jude at Grassroots, and later Ian at Barcombe (due to wasp damage he is building the apiary and will let us know when it will be open again).
- We have added those on our apiary WhatsApp groups with the members of the study groups attending, and some members have already asked to be included at the apiary close to them. Please message any of the managers via our WhatsApp Buzz to be included in their WhatsApp contacts.
- We encourage you to visit any or all the apiaries this season.

If you are not a member of a study group and want to visit our apiaries this summer, please contact our apiary managers who will:

- Book you into a session—the Honey Bee Health group is large, so spaces

- are limited sometimes.
- Contact you if the apiary plans to run extra sessions
- Contact you if the apiary can't open e.g. due to poor weather conditions

Making and building

There are two extra meetings planned for hive making, we are encouraging new beekeepers to buy a flat-packed hive, then bring it to The Barn, for assembling. If you have a small building project a super to construct, a roof to make, and would like a bit of supervision let us know we will do our best to accommodate you on one of this year's sessions.

Please book your slot

Everyone is welcome to come along to comment on what we do; this year it will be necessary to book your space at least 24 hours in advance.

From April to the end of August, at least one of the teaching apiaries will be open for business. The teaching apiaries are supporting some of our newer beekeepers for basic assessment, honey bee health study group sessions, queen rearing or for beginner beekeepers.



Grassroots apiary. Photo: Jude New

Hedging our apiaries

We welcome support from all beekeepers to help maintain hedges, mow grass and weeds, build hive stands, clean and maintain hives, offer breaks during holidays, answer questions, look through hives with us, support the less experienced and stay for a cup of tea and some cake.

Jude New, Apiaries Manager



Hove apiary. Photo: Jude New

Frame-cleaning workshop

Half-day workshop in Laughton

Are your frames clean, and now require replacing with new foundation?

Here's a relaxed event where you bring your dirty frames to clean and insert new foundation for 2025.

Depending on interest this may be held at different times during the day.

We will also be discussing **Solar Wax Extractors** with the availability to build your own, using a polystyrene container. We do have access to some of these, so please book your space so we can get more if required.

Cost: £5 per person, with refreshment provided.

Dates available 25 April and 10 May, 09.30 – 13.00



More details

Chatting at the Bee Chats has highlighted that beekeepers with some experience require further help with this. And this workshop is geared to beekeepers who have some experience of beekeeping and now want to expand their knowledge.

Questions that occur time and time again:

- When do I change my foundation?
- Is it OK to use brown foundation?

The answer is that a third should be changed per year, per hive. Do you have all the correct equipment to do this process?

We both use an urn with soda crystals. We have worked together cleaning our equipment in a friendly, chatty way. Learning as we go along.

Come along with your dirty brown foundation, and learn how to get the best from your frames, cleaning process and replacing with new foundation.

We will supply the refreshments, and we will teach you how we clean up. This is not a wax workshop, but a workshop showing you one way of making your frames last longer.

What to wear

You will need to wear old clothes, and need to bring with you: Plastic gloves, apron, frames, hammer, nails, new



foundation, hive tool, cloths for cleaning, plastic bag to take your old comb away, mug and money for the course .

Solar wax extractor

We will also be talking about making your own solar wax extractor. We have access to some polystyrene containers, so you can take one home with you **if you let us know** so we can get more if required, so please book.

Location

We will be working at Shirley's in her barn in Laughton, with plenty of parking.

To book

If you are interested and to book please contact Hilary on osmans.home@btinternet.com or phone/txt on 07713532285. Cost: £5 with refreshments included.

Winter meetings

Date	Topic
Wed 16 Apr	The special language of bees, by Margaret Murdin

All meetings are live and start at 19.15 for 19.30 at Eastgate Baptist Church Hall, Lewes BN7 2LR

Next Bee Chat: see our WhatsApp Buzz group or Facebook

Spring/summer meetings

Date	Event	Location
Saturday 17 May	Sussex BKA Bee Market	Uckfield College
Sunday 22 June	Out-apiary meeting with Jeff Rodrigues	Rottingdean Apiary

Other events will be added nearer the time. The season starts here!

Newsletter deadlines

Please send all contributions, **including photos**, to the Editor (contact details on the right). Max length 500 words.

Copy deadline: 18th of the month before publication date, except 11 December. Email photos for the website to Gerald Legg (details on the right).

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Hove: Adrien Parker
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Sussex BKA Representatives: Ian White & Manek Dubash

National Honey Show Rep: Vacant

Disclaimer: Brighton and Lewes Division of the SBKA cannot accept any responsibility for loss, injury or damage sustained by persons in consequence of their participation in activities arranged by the Division.