THE IPSWICH & EAST SUFFOLK BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION

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Newsletter for July – September 2025

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Opinions expressed in this Newsletter are not necessarily those either of the Editor or of the Association.

The Suffolk Beekeepers' Association is an Area Association of The British Beekeepers' Association. http://www.bbka.org.uk/

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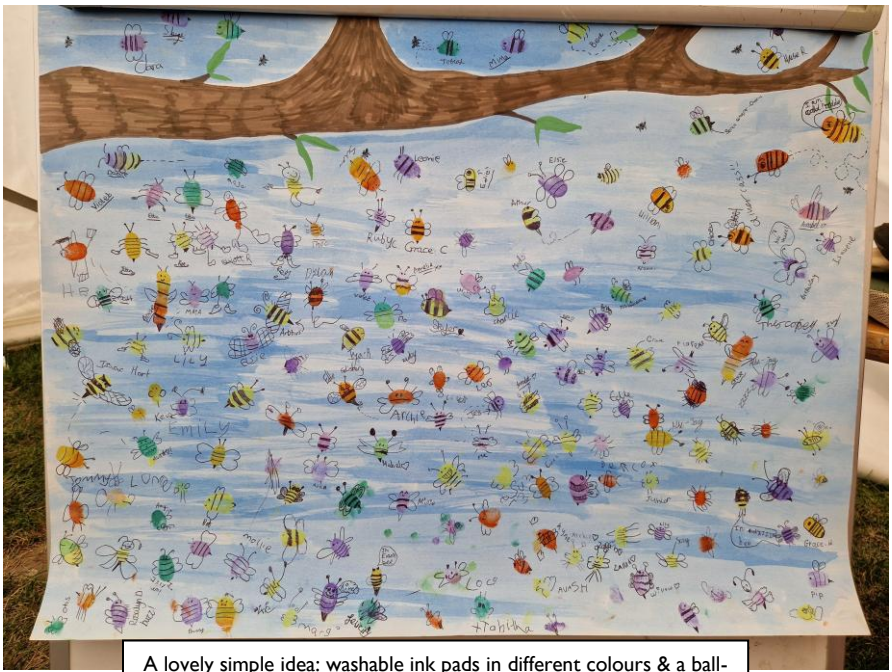
The 2025 Suffolk Show.

Photos mostly by Paula Irvine

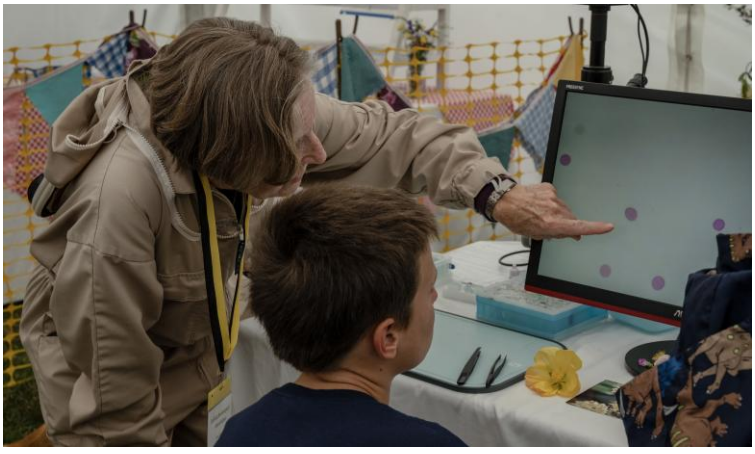
Richard, our Secretary, in Yellow-legged hornet garb



A lovely simple idea: washable ink pads in different colours & a ball-pen to outline the thumb-print: "Where has your bee landed"?

Heather's beautiful new observation hive was much admired – so were the bees!

Criticism! At the Microscopy table, we had many insects in transparent boxes but none was labelled. We need someone who, over the 2025-26 winter would take the boxes home and identify the creatures. If that could be you, please contact JeremyO@tiscali.co.uk.



Wanted!

We need a Newsletter Editor, a Speaker Finder and some Ten-Minute Talk speakers too. The Association doesn't run by magic; things don't just happen; please help!


Much honey was sold

Our Wherstead Teaching Apiary

At the time of writing, we are roughly halfway through the 2025 syllabus. On average we are getting about fifteen students per week attending which is a significant increase on previous years.

The agenda this year is very much focussed on Basic Beekeeping and designed to equip you with the knowledge and confidence to be able to look after your own bees, making sure that they survive the season and pass the Basic Assessment as an acknowledgement that you understand the fundamentals.

It has been a busy few months in the apiary. We have updated some of the equipment and rationalised to three different hive types. Over 60 percent of these have had fresh new comb added. Similarly, most honey supers also have fresh combs in readiness for the honey flow. Changing to fresh comb on a timely basis is always good practice, especially in the brood box.

On a final note, if there are any topics or subjects that you want included in the syllabus, please let me know. We may have ability to incorporate what you need, and we certainly have the experience within the team to deliver it.

Many thanks for your support. We cannot make the Teaching Apiary work without you.

Phil Ramsey

The Last B

After the last ee
had uzzed its last uzz,
the irds and the utterflies
did what they could.

ut soon the fields lay are,
few flowers were left,
nature was roken,
and the planet ereft.

Anon. Thank you Bristol BKA

Improving Beekeeping Skills Course 2025. *'The most fun you can have in a bee-suit!'* Students report:

"I have wanted to attend this course for some time, but found that each year, there was always one day I couldn't attend, so when I received an invitation this year and was able to attend all three days, I snapped up the opportunity! Two of the days were spent in Dallinghoo where we had the opportunity to visit Jeremy's apiary (and enjoy lunch in his garden) and another day was spent in Westhall, near Halesworth, where we were able to visit Peter Langford's apiary. We were blessed with the weather and despite being familiar with many of the topics covered, this course was invaluable. Barry and Jeremy spoke of queen rearing and we practiced queen grafting, making up mini-nucs and discussed methods such as the Ben Harden method. Chris Milton gave an energetic presentation on identifying bee diseases and it certainly made me go back to my apiary and check my hives very carefully! Peter demonstrated shook swarms and performed a Bailey comb change on one of the hives in his apiary, and Jane spoke of handling aggressive colonies, swarm control/prevention, as well as identifying drone laying queens and laying workers. Jeremy demonstrated the process of making soft set honey and preparing show standard wax blocks and the course concluded with Jane encouraging us to consider the General Husbandry Assessment. There was a good balance between theory and practical activities, and I would like to thank Jane Corcoran, Jeremy Quinlan, Barry Crabtree, Peter Langford and Chris Milton for an interesting and informative 3-day course which I would recommend to anyone with a few years' beekeeping experience under their belt. I am now off to re-organise my apiary, have a go at producing soft set honey, try queen grafting and sign up for the General Husbandry Assessment next year! *Emma Nye*

Other comments. The Improving Beekeeping Skills course was an enjoyable and stimulating three days. With engaging talks and demonstrations from experienced beekeepers, I gained experience in new skills and the confidence to try them out in my own apiary. Watching videos online can be a great way to learn new methods in queen rearing, integrated pest management, or swarm control; however, there is no substitute for learning alongside a knowledgeable and patient tutor and equally enthusiastic peers. *Tom Phillips*

I recently attended the Improving Beekeeping Skills Course - a brilliant step up from the Basic! With a mix of hands-on apiary work and classroom learning, we covered everything from swarm prevention, bee diseases and viruses, comb exchange, queen rearing and bee health. Practicing grafting queen cells and starting our own mini nus boxes was a real highlight! It was fantastic to share knowledge, ask questions and connect with other beekeepers, each with their own take, of course! Big thanks to Jeremy for the excellent biscuits and to everyone who made the course so rewarding. Highly recommended for anyone looking to boost their beekeeping confidence and skills. *Lorna Barker*

We hope the 2026 Improving Beekeeping Skills Course will run on 25th and 26th April and 3rd May 2026. Please don't apply unless you hold the BBKA's Basic and have at least four years' beekeeping experience. Applications to Jeremy Quinlan: JeremyQ@tiscali.co.uk.

A beekeeping visit to a local school *by Margaret & Malcolm Rittman*

When we had a plea for someone to talk to a local primary school about beekeeping, I jumped for joy and immediately said yes. As a retired teacher of 3–9-year-olds, I was excited about the opportunity this would present to incite some excitement in young children (and their teachers) about our ancient craft.

Malc and I have given presentations to adults in the past so it wasn't too difficult to adapt these for young children. The classes we were to visit were nursery: 19 3- & 4-year-olds and 31 Year 1 5- & 6-year-olds.

For the nursery group, we used physical illustrations such as an empty super frame, an extracted frame and a fully capped frame with about a kilo of honey in it. I hasten to add that the latter two were securely wrapped in cling film to reduce the stickiness! These were handed round the group so that they could inspect the frames and experience the weight. We also handed round a lump of wax to hold and smell and left them with some honey to taste. We answered questions and finished with a dressing up session as all the children tried on a child sized bee top and veil. The teacher ensured a photo was taken of each child. This session lasted about half an hour but the children seemed engrossed with all they were experiencing.

The Yr1 group were very well prepared. They had been doing work on the environment and were well informed about pollination and other insects. They already had a list of questions for us to answer, some of which were good, such as 'how many bees are there in a hive?' 'Do bees hibernate?' 'How long does a bee live?' etc., as well as others such as 'Is there a king bee?' 'How do they grow their wings?' We used a PowerPoint presentation with illustrations and questions on each frame which illustrated and informed on many aspects of the life of a bee. We were unable to get an observation hive but managed to take a 10-minute video of a hive inspection where we actually saw the queen and she obligingly had a wander across the brood frame. Unfortunately, the class laptop wasn't able to show the video, but we left a copy with them in the hopes they would be able to see it at some time.

After the morning break, we moved to a more practical session and split the children into 3 groups. Malc's group looked at wax, tools, smoker, smoker fuel and more technical aspects of the craft. One child asked if we used black wood in the smoker - possibly thinking of charcoal, or even the colour of the sediment in the smoker! The second group, overseen by the teacher and assistant tried on the bee tops. My group handled the wax, smelt a jar of honey and held the 3 super frames. We also left them with a jar of honey to taste.

We arrived at 9.15 and left at midday, exhausted but feeling good about the morning. We had some very positive feedback from the YR1 class who sent us some flowers and a beautiful card illustrated by pictures of what each of them had learned from the session. The teacher has already booked us for next year!

Bees and Schools

'So how many 4-6-year-olds are there in this group?' I asked as they poured in.
'Oh, 250 - is that OK?"

'Fine….! Could you get my pics on your laptop screen please?'
'Oh, we can't do that, they've changed the security settings'
'Oh, what shall I do then?'
'Oh, just talk to them for 30 minutes… you'll be fine!'
Actually - as my school teaching life flooded back, it was OK. Then came the next group.
'And how many 7–10-year-olds?'
'Oh, just 250 again…' and so it went on…
But in actual fact, it was all very enjoyable… in retrospect.
I've got the recipe sorted now. Take one primary school, add a picture PowerPoint, a smoker, some frames and some dressing up clothes - and a jar of honey.
Begin with: 'What do bees eat for breakfast, dinner, tea and midnight feasts?' (No greedy beekeepers), and end with a 'Moki and the Bees' book reading for literacy. Seems to work.
Schools since May: Dale Hall, Broke Hall, Freeman Primary, Littlegarth, Clifford Lane - and more to come.
If you've got any schools in need - let me know. All talks are free.
Best question so far; 'How easy is it to make a living as a beekeeper?' Insightful! *Helen Thorne*

Now I understand...
Bigger bees carry heavier loads... or "How old is your brood comb?"

I think there have been two step-change improvements in my beekeeping over the years; these being converting to 14 x 12 brood frames within 10 years of starting and then getting my solar wax extractor going a few years after that. In my early years, I was reluctant to scrap what seemed to be quite good brood frames from disease-free colonies, especially as the replacements cost me money. Just replacing the wax was far from free, and my crops weren't that big back then...
After moving to 14 x 12 frames, I found that my honey crop improved, to the extent that I had to buy more supers. Then putting the solar wax extractor into use super-charged the effect. Eventually, I came to accept that clean brood comb of was significant value. When I was looking online for justification for my belief that my "young" brood comb was one of the factors in my normally-good honey crops I came across an American magazine article which explained it.
The article in Beeculture https://www.beeculture.com/why-comb-rotation-is-important/ is well worth reading as it quotes research as well as the author's experience. Our bees are (hopefully) not exposed to the cocktail of pesticides which are used in the USA, nor do we have endemic foulbrood, which I understand is suppressed with antibiotics across the pond but other parts are relevant.
Here are some quotes from the article: "On average, colonies with new comb produced a greater area of brood, a greater area of sealed brood, and higher weight of individual young bees."
Also, "Bees reared in old comb may weigh up to 19% less than bees reared in new comb." The message here is clear: "Colonies full of old, dark, heavy comb will have smaller bees and fewer of them."
And from a classic textbook *The Biology of the Honey Bee* by Mark Winston, 1987; "Honey bees typically carry pollen and nectar loads representing 20% and 35% of body mass, respectively, maximally reaching 80% of body mass."
So, putting those points together, you have: clean brood comb gives you more bees and bigger ones too, and bigger bees carry a bigger payload! Running on clean young brood comb is easier for me to justify nowadays...
Of course, changing to 14 x 12 frames made me replace all the comb in my brood boxes! No wonder it boosted my bees' productivity back then!

Andrew Easterbrook From the newsletter of the Cheshire Beekeepers' Association

Fighting honey fraud with AI technology

McGill University researchers have developed an AI-powered method to verify the origin of honey, ensuring that what's on the label matches what's in the jar. The breakthrough, published in *Analytical Chemistry*, offers a potential solution to a long-standing problem.
"Honey is one of the most fraud-prone commodities in global trade. It often involves mislabelling where it was produced or the types of flowers that bees collected nectar from," said senior author Stéphane Bayen, Associate Professor and Chair of McGill's Department of Food Science and Agricultural Chemistry.
Honeys made from a single species are often more expensive, prized for their unique flavours and potential health benefits. Some producers intentionally mislabel honey in order to charge more, while others may do so unknowingly, given that tracking exactly where bees collect nectar can be challenging.
The new method can determine what type of flowers the bees visited to produce a particular honey, which is important because consumers pay a premium for honey made from the nectar of a single type of flower.
Until now, authenticating honey has been done through pollen analysis, a technique that fails after honey is processed or filtered. The new approach uses high-resolution mass spectrometry to scan honey at a molecular level to create a unique chemical "fingerprint." Machine learning algorithms then read the fingerprint to verify the honey's origin.
To check the accuracy of their method, the researchers tested it on a variety of honey samples and compared the results to honey from known botanical sources.
"Right now, identifying the true source of honey can take days. With our method, we can do it in minutes, even for processed honeys where traditional techniques fall short."
Protection for consumers and producers. The scientists say demand for local varieties, like Quebec's blueberry honey, is rising as more people prioritize buying local. The new technique could serve as a safeguard for both consumers and ethical beekeepers.

"People deserve to know that their honey is what it claims to be, and honest producers deserve protection from fraudulent competitors". The researchers hope to see their technique adopted by food inspection agencies worldwide. Their next step is to explore how it could be used for other food products prone to fraud.

More information: Shawninder Chahal et al, Rapid Convolutional Algorithm for the Discovery of Blueberry Honey Authenticity Markers via Nontargeted LC-MS Analysis, *Analytical Chemistry* (2024). DOI: 10.1021/acs.analchem.4c01778

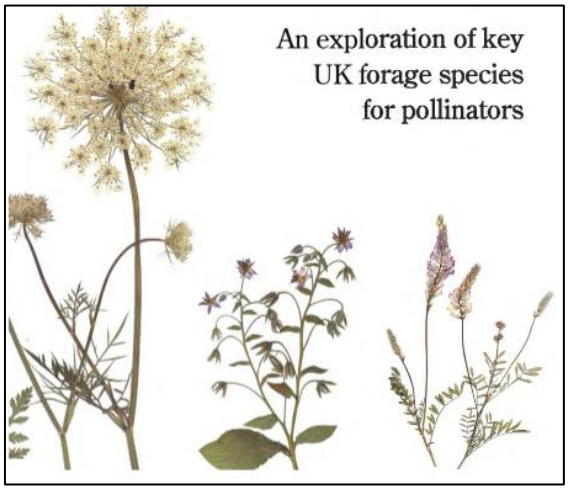
Bramble (*Rubus fruticosus*)

As you grapple with its twelve feet long, thorn-festooned stems in your garden you might not realise (or care) what a fascinating plant the bramble is. Most of us would get a lot less honey from our colonies without it. The plant consists of a deep and robust perennial root stock which sends out shoots in the growing season. These shoots have a two-year cycle; the first year is longitudinal growth, producing long, arching stems along the ground and up into hedges. The growing tips behave like runners and will root on contact with the ground, tripping the unwary. It is this property that makes it such a formidable weed as each of these rooted plants can become independent, rather like strawberries but not so welcome. The following year sees lateral shoots with flowers. In autumn of that year, the shoot dies off. The plant is constantly sending new shoots out following this cycle. There are several hundred micro-species of bramble in the UK alone. This is explained by the fact that, as well as reproducing by rooting, they do not need pollinating to set fruit/seed (like dandelions, they produce clones of themselves, a process called apomixis) which seems ironic as the flowers are so attractive to insects. However, they can reproduce

Sexually through pollination, hence the spread of so many varieties. The white or pink flowers, much beloved of all pollinators, form from late May, peaking from mid-June to July and herald the start of the main honey flow. They can continue sporadically late into September. The prolonged flowering is explained, in part, by the 300+ different sub-species which have slightly different flowering times. Blackberry nectar is very high in sugar, hence its attractiveness to bees and its honey is slow to granulate. The pollen, however, is relatively low in protein. Pollen loads are pale grey. A blackberry thicket in full bloom is a sight to behold on a sunny day. The open flowers attract butterflies, beetles, hoverflies, wasps and bees in abundance as well as providing cover for nesting birds and sundry furry creatures. I just don't want one in my garden!

David Fray, Editor, The Cheshire Beekeeper

Where do all the bees go? A book review



Where Do The Bees Go? Is a detailed guide to 24 of the key UK families of important pollinator plants for bees. Jacques is a scientist by profession with a special interest in biology and botany relating to beekeeping. She is a Master Beekeeper and was inspired to compile this plant portfolio while studying for the National Diploma in Beekeeping which is unique to the British Isles. What makes this publication stand out from similar beekeeping books is the attention to detail and its timely focus on all UK bee pollinators which are currently under threat from climate change, habitat loss, disease, and pesticides. It is a beautifully illustrated book and the pressed flower photographs are superb. The author has painstakingly and skilfully collected and preserved an elaborate herbarium, and photographed pollen grains from each collected plant.

The book is written in a field guide format though its A4 size probably restricts its use to indoors. We find information relating to each plant family including the number of genera and species, and features such as leaf shape, petal numbers, fruit type, flowering times and habitat. The most valuable information for the beekeeper or conservationist relates to the food value of each plant which is reflected in its nectar and pollen production. The protein value of each pollen is explained and shown as a crude protein level. We learn that plants whose pollen falls in the crude protein range of above 25% are considered to be of most value to foragers.

The other key features are bee forage potential, and notable foraging bee species which are shown in tabulated form. We learn whether a particular plant produces pollen, nectar, or both, and if it is of value to honey bees, long-tongued or short-tongues bumble bees, or solitary bees. The different foraging bees are listed by both common and binomial names.

Some families contain more useful plants than others and here the pea family (Fabaceae) section, for example, features five important plants all with similarly sized and shaped pollen grains and crude protein values. A contents page to help the reader navigate the book, and an extensive reference list contribute to the value of this book for beekeepers and beekeeping students with impending examinations. However, the readership of this informative and topical book will be wide-ranging - farmers, botanists, conservationists, gardeners, research scientists and many others will find this a very useful book.

Ann Chilcott, Author of The Beelistener Blog (Courtesy The Cheshire Beekeeper)

The June Gap

What is the June gap? It has become a cliché of beekeeping but does it really exist and if so, how do we recognise it?

The term refers to a period of several weeks between the end of the flowering of spring plants, which are primarily trees and shrubs, and the beginning of the herbaceous summer-flowering plants. Gardeners also use the term for a flowering hiatus after the tulips and other spring flowers finish and before the summer flowers bloom. How do you recognise a nectar flow and, conversely, the absence of one? I used to think there was an esoteric way of reading the bees and knowing. In part, it is seen when there are lots of foragers leaving and

returning with purpose but the main way is simply seeing nectar in the brood box. It is runny and falls out readily from the frame when it is tipped or shaken. The bees pack it everywhere, including back-filling the brood nest which can be a problem if the queen does not have enough room to lay. In a nectar dearth, bees can be more defensive and robbing is more likely. If you leave any honey-filled wax around the apiary, bees will be over it very quickly.

Factors that influence the gap's timing

1. Where you keep your bees
Urban beekeepers are much less likely to have a problem because much of their forage comes from gardens and these have a more varied range of plants, and flowering times, than the countryside. In rural Cheshire, the forage is primarily trees and hedgerows in the spring, ending with sycamore, OSR if you are near it, and hawthorn, beginning again with bramble and clover. The timing of the end of spring flowering is key to a June gap. And flowering is getting earlier. Average UK flowering times between 1987 and 2019 have been found to be a month earlier than between 1753 - 1986[1].

2. Weather
The timing of a June gap is influenced by rainfall, or lack of it, and temperature. Prolonged rain prevents the foragers from doing their thing and cool weather and little sunshine will limit nectar yields, especially plants such as clover and lime. In our unpredictable UK climate, a drought in June will seriously reduce summer flowering and limit nectar production. Flowering is sensitive to temperature over the previous month, especially so in spring-flowering plants, and it is easy to see that if spring flowers come early through warm weather (this spring for example) the summer flowering plants may not be so early - hence a more pronounced June gap. That is my prediction for this year, anyway…

3. Style of beekeeping
There are two scenarios where your colonies could run into problems in June. With a small foraging force, nucs are very vulnerable to starvation. Regular feeding may be required. I have lost nucs in the past through this. And, of course, this is just the time when you may have lots of mating nucs or nucs as part of swarm control…

The other situation arises if you take off a spring crop in May. The queen's laying is maximal, colony and brood numbers are at their peak in June and if you take away too much honey and there is a nectar dearth, queen laying reduces, some brood may die or the colony may even starve.

4. Mitigation
At the end of the spring flow, when the sycamore and hawthorn have finished, ensure your colonies have enough stores to take them through a couple of weeks. This is sound practice whatever the time of year. A prolonged period of poor weather can reduce foraging at any time. The colony should have the equivalent of two full brood frame-equivalents of honey to cover it for one or two weeks. A prolonged gap may last that long. If you have a full super or two, that is fine but a young, expanding colony is vulnerable, as are nucs. Do not be afraid to feed syrup in these cases. Robbing may be an issue in a nectar dearth so feed in the evening and don't leave syrup or honey around the apiary. Smaller entrances may be needed in some colonies until the bramble blooms and saves us.
David Fray

Wasps

According to reports, just as it has been a good year for bees, it will be a good year for wasps. Strong colonies and small entrances are essential – if they aren't, reduce them **now**. I keep my entrances small the year round – 7mm high and no more than 120mm wide.
If you do consider a colony is being overwhelmed, even after reducing the entrance, perhaps to a single bee- space, the best thing to do is to move it elsewhere. Wasps have a relatively short foraging radius – only a few hundred yards.
Vita Bee Health is advertising its "HiveGate" as a defence against wasps and robbing bees – in my view, this is another bit of bee kit no one needs. *Jeremy*

Selective breeding: best for bees? - or best for beekeepers? - or neither?

How would you react to the claim that selective breeding (e.g., selecting for calm behaviour, higher honey yields, less likely to swarm, etc.) could be undermining the ability of honey bees to survive? You might find this claim shocking, but you may be surprised to learn that it is not without scientific evidence.
You might have missed a reference in BeeCraft (March 2025) to a scientific paper by Jacques van Alphen in the Netherlands entitled 'The Downside of Selection: A Forgotten Cause of Honeybee Decline'. It was published earlier this year in the journal 'Archives of Microbiology and Immunology', so very current. It is worthwhile considering why we practice selective breeding in the first place. Beekeepers generally do not like being stung, so we would prefer docile bees with low defensive reaction. We like honey, or want to sell lots of it, so we like highly productive bees. Swarming is a real nuisance to the beekeeper, so let's get bees that hardly ever swarm. However well intentioned, is it advantageous to the bees to develop these traits?
Defensiveness is an essential behaviour of honey bees. If we make them less defensive/aggressive towards beekeepers, what is the effect of lowered aggressiveness towards predators or even other strains of bees? It has been shown that breeding for higher honey production

has led to a faster metabolism in the bee, reducing its lifespan. In the USA, unexpectedly, selective breeding for higher yield has resulted in an overall decrease in honey production. This is because the gain from higher production level is more than offset by the reduced life span in which to collect honey, demonstrating that selection for a 'desirable' trait can come at a cost. With a shortened life span, winter survival also becomes more difficult.

Swarming is how bees reproduce – it is a basic instinct. Do we really want to interfere with their natural impulse to reproduce? There is a more serious aspect to all this. It is not what is being selected for that is the problem, but the method of selection. Honey bees rely on a wide genetic diversity to be able to develop natural resistance to new diseases. Evolution works by natural selection on changes to an organism's genetic makeup caused by random mutations and other factors. Without getting too technical, a gene is a segment of DNA (the genetic material that exists in every cell of our body) that determines a specific trait or characteristic, such as eye colour or height. An allele is a variant form of a gene; for example, a gene for eye colour may have alleles for blue, brown, or green eyes (of course, it is not that simple, but it will do).

Selection for desirable traits usually involves taking a small sample from a large population. For example, to increase honey yield, queens are propagated from colonies that already have a higher honey yield than the other colonies in the population and those with lower yield are bred out. This process is then repeated with the colonies of those queens, and so on for several generations. Because alleles are not all equally common, the probability of an allele being included in selection of a small sample is not the same for each allele. Common alleles are more likely to be included in the sample than rare ones. As a result, the rare alleles tend to disappear as selection by the beekeeper using small samples continues.

Selective breeding could be undermining the ability of honey bees to survive

This applies not only to the alleles of genes involved in the traits being selected for, but also to the rare alleles of all other genes. The fact that rare alleles of other genes can be lost means that the effects go far beyond the traits that are being chosen for.

The result is that bees with traits desired by the beekeeper may now lack the genetic variation necessary to respond to new pathogens or new variants of existing pathogens. It has been established that genetic variation in European honey bees declined during the 20th century.

Bees have developed a mechanism that should counteract this loss of rare alleles. A virgin queen will mate with 8 to 20 drones (some argue the number can be higher). This behaviour is called polyandry and nature's way of ensuring the spread of rare alleles. But it depends on those alleles being retained in the native population. However, if one attempts to flood the area with drones (as advocated by some bee breeders), and these drones are produced by queens that have been subject to selection, the drones may also not have rare alleles (remember: the drones only possess the genetic material of their mother).

Nature's way of retaining genetic diversity can be thwarted. So, this is definitely something to think about. That is not the end of the story, however. There is more to come in the next article. In the meantime, any feedback is welcomed.

Gordon Allan, President, West Sussex BKA. June 2025

Ask two beekeepers, get three answers: a bit about your beekeeping after the initial year with a lovely little colony, bought in a nucleus, or acquired as a swarm…

I think back to when I began beekeeping and I dutifully did my beginners' training with Jeremy, and Geoff did his again, as it had been around 15 years. We had already bought a colony of bees and some homemade equipment from someone in Langham (so Essex) who told us he was giving up because he had an allergic reaction to his bees. Yeah, right! Those bees were feisty.

They were feisty, prolific and swarmy. Later they were called Vile and Nasty. The beginners' course didn't talk about this. Neither did the books we had. Advice (online) was to find and kill the queens and introduce new ones. Getting in there to inspect them was just horrible. I still recall Barry Crabtree coming to our garden. Initially no bee suit. A set of disciples (so named because they would follow you any and everywhere), and several stings later, he was properly suited. It took him about 30-40 minutes to be rid enough to get back in his car after reassuring us that the newly emerged queen would be fine (they swarmed several times after that, and we went from one split colony to 6 that second year).

So, the thing is, many of us begin by doing the beginners' course, attending the Teaching Apiary in year one, we have a mentor, and maybe we take a little honey in our first year and we think we have 'got' this. Then in year two, the bees build up faster than we anticipate, (if they don't die over winter) and they swarm. We scramble for kit. Then they re-queen or she disappears and their temperament deteriorates and we are often overwhelmed by that feeling of "what the heck?" (choose from), what shall I do?/they're not supposed to…/OMG, I know nothing… and so on. I call it my cup of tea moment. It's really important if you are on your own or with a beekeeping buddy. Stop. Have a think. Obviously Plan A is out of the window (often, so is plan B).

So why not come back to the Teaching Apiary!? We split into (usually) three groups when we inspect - beginners, done a bit, bit more knowledgeable. For the absolute beginners, yes, which gloves, do your suit up properly, holding your hive tool, picking up bees, and so on. The latter two groups might be thinking about preparing for their Basic Assessment but the inspections are more about little tips and discussion about reading the hives, not the absolute basics. "My bees are doing this… what shall I do?" and building your confidence by experiencing different things, talking through other people's disasters (there is no shame in that). None of us know everything, and talking to others will often give you options you had not considered before.

If you want the "phone a friend" options:

- you are welcome to tick the help wanted option when you renew your membership and we will try and source a mentor for you.
- and of course, there is the Tuesday 7.30pm "Ask a beekeeper" Zoom *call* *https://us02web.zoom.us/j/82092440005?pwd=JBbUv8QMwZx8D6TleEJLJ9UBm6z6te.1*
- then there are the winter meetings (first Wednesday of the month) in Kesgrave,
- the Felixstowe Bee Group in Kirton (third Thursdays in the winter & spring),
- the Bee Breakfast, coffee, and chat (second Saturday mornings each month except December)
- not forgetting the WhatsApp Group.

So don't suffer on your own, join in, ask away - and enjoy your beekeeping! *Sal Thurlow*

Vacuum Swarm Collector

Approximately 10 years ago one of the club members came up with the idea of a vacuum swarm collector connected to a conventional unit powered by the mains. It consisted of a hose connected to a collection box with a carpet baffle for the bees to impact against to minimise damage and a further connection to the vacuum cleaner. It worked extremely well but had restrictions such as size and the need for mains power.

Just before Christmas my wife decided to buy a mains ash collector and having emptied it for the first time, I realised that by removing the filter it could be adapted to collect bees. It was then I started searching the internet for a battery-operated vacuum that I could modify.

I had a chance to use the prototype a week ago for a medium-size swarm deep inside a privet hedge. In approximately ten minutes, the swarm was collected into a muslin bag and immediately transferred into a nuc box. I went back approximately 30 minutes later and collected the remaining stragglers using a spare bag. There was only one casualty from the whole swarm.

Current Specification.
Make: LIGO via Amazon - currently out of stock - cost £37
Lithium-ion Ash Vacuum 15l capacity 120watt Rechargeable battery
Model MWA803-20v-15l
Alternative supplier SUSAM cost £48
Link: https://susam.co.uk/product/ligo-20v-cordless-ash-dust-vacuum-cleaner

Construction The protype is quite basic. The original vacuum comes with a conventual spiral hose but I worried that it would damage bees' wings so this was removed and with it the attachment fitting and the 90° bend inside the housing. The filter was also removed.
The hose was replaced with copper pipe insulation lagging which is 50mm od x 30mm bore. This fits exactly through the hole left by the hose fitting which is held onto the casing with four screws.
I inserted a short length of the pipe insulation long enough so it could be taped both inside and outside to stop it sliding through the hole. I also blocked off the four holes with small squares of black tape on the inside to make it air tight.
Inside the insulation lagging, I inserted a 33mm dia approximately 180mm long piece of water pipe which is a tight fit with the hole being 30mm dia. This enables the insulation hose to pushed onto the length on the outside and secured with a cable tie and the muslin bag to be attached on the inside - again with a cable tie. I use reusable cable ties which can be undone easily and reused.
The hose is also a length of insulation pipe 50mm od 30mm id but it is split down the centre; this has to be sealed with a length of tape. I added more tape round the circumference, making the hose air-tight. The insulation pipe comes in 2.3m lengths as standard which means it can be cut into shorter lengths or used in one long length for swarms high up without having to climb ladders.
The current muslin bag is 300mm wide x 500mm long with a draw-string. The next step is to ask my wife to make a larger bag with a narrow neck to allow it to more easily fit onto the plastic pipe.
Plastic Nuc Box for Swarm Collecting approx. £11 eBay.
Ivan Richardson 09/05/2025 [with the Editor's apologies for the editing!]

Calendar

Unless otherwise specified, Ipswich & East Suffolk BKA winter talks are held in Scout Hall, Kesgrave IP5 1JF from 7:30 pm

Members of the six Associations which form the Suffolk Beekeepers' Association are welcome to attend any or all these meetings.
If you do not belong to that particular local association, please introduce yourself to that BKA secretary.
There will be other meetings but details were not available at the time we went to press.

Date	Event	Details
Sun 27 July	West Suffolk Safari: 09.45 for 10.15. Finish: 15.00 Zac Blackmore's apiary, then Mike Graystone's	Numbers limited. Applications to: Sandy.norman1@gmail.com
Sun 10 Aug	Final Day for 2025 at our Wherstead Apiary	
Wed 2 Sep	Kesgrave meeting 7:30pm	Auction, Forum

Honey oatcakes for cheese

75g oats, 20g flour, pinch of salt, ⅕ teaspoon bicarb 20g butter 20-30ml very hot water, 2 tablespoonfuls strong flavoured honey

- Mix the flour, salt and bicarb
- Add the butter, cubed and rub in
- Stir in the oats. If you want shop-bought you could use a food processor and chop the oats up - if not, more like hobnobs/flapjack oats
- Add the honey to the hot water and stir to melt
- Add it to the dry ingredients until it forms a thick dough
- (Tea)spoon onto the baking sheet and flatten into 12 even sized rounds
- Cook for 20 minutes at 170°C or until golden (flatter cook faster)
- Let them cool completely before moving them
- Best eaten on the day, with a strong, sharp Cheddar.

Suffolk Beekeepers' Association – Bulk Bee Feed

The bee feed team is again offering bee winter feed @ 78p per kg (20% less than last year).
The order must be in kg but we suggest you just fill to 13kg. (A rule of thumb is that a syrup can when really full holds about 14kg (or 10 litres). To get it through the winter, a colony needs about 20kg of honey or feed substitute. Larger hives headed by prolific queens may require more. When full, a BS brood frame holds about 2.2 kg of honey, so assess the existing colony stores and feed the required balance. Please complete the form here.
The only days for collection are Saturday 2nd and 9th August. Collection is from Deben View, Back Lane, FALKENHAM. IP10 0TL What3words.

Thinking of taking a BBKA Exam Module this winter? The idea is coordinated self-study by Zoom. Which Module? Which evening? If you are interested, please get in touch with Jeremy Quinlan (JeremyQ@tiscali.co.uk or 01473-737700) to discuss details.

EARS (East Anglian Research Student) There's little to report. Since the last student dropped out, we are looking for a new worth-while project. One idea is an AI assisted photo-driven disease screening tool. As an example, if there's a worry about some situation in a colony, take a photo and send it in; a machine scans your photo and if it 'decides' the situation is likely to be due to a pest or disease, it alerts the NBU and refers your photo to a human. This idea has been proposed to a Cambridge University team; they were very positive and we await the next meeting and hope we will then have something concrete to tell you.