



February Newsletter

2026



My Blackthorn
hedge is
already in full
flower

Contents

Welcome
Dates for your diary
Seen around the internet
Tips for March
Newbury & District BKA - Louisa Houghton
Vale & Downland BKA News - John Broadbent
Telford Show - John Broadbent
Adverts

Welcome

March is here and Spring officially starts on 20th March. I am seeing a lot of activity at my hives and any sun brings the bees streaming out. The weather has not been great though, with a lot of rain. My weather app only goes out as far as 23 Mar, but it's fair to say we still have a fair amount of damp and cold miserable days ahead with just a couple of sunny days. If we can just get our colonies safely through this period then I am sure we will see them racing away and into swarm season before we know it. There are some bad reports of losses, both locally and online. It appears that the south and southeast

have been the worst affected - the only solace being if it has been bad for bees then hopefully doubly so for wasps and Yellow Legged Asian Hornets. Hopefully any queens overwintering underground (and apparently YLH Queens quite like rabbit burrows) will have drowned. I know several beekeepers who have reported queen wasps under their hive roofs when they have been putting on slabs of fondant - I think the record I have heard so far is 4. Can you beat that?

Talking of fondant, I have had to give several of my hives an extra slab this week. They have hefted light and inspections underneath show lots of cappings (from brood or stores, I'm not sure as I haven't looked inside). This is a very vulnerable time for the bees - awake and active, but not able to bring stores in. They can easily consume 2-3kg of stores in a week so keep checking. It would be a dreadful shame to have got your bees to this point and then lose them to starvation. Just saying.

This week we have the usual columns, plus reports from Newbury and Vale. Simon Rogers reports on the Vale Asian Hornet Meeting held on 20th Feb - applicable to both organisations. Finally, a very short note from me on my impressions of the Telford Beekeeping Show held yesterday, 21st Feb.

John

Dates for your diary

<u>Newbury & District</u>
First Tuesday of the month, 7:30pm-9:30pm at St Mary's Church Hall, Shaw cum Donnington RG14 2DR 3rd March - Managing swarming season with Stephen Greer 7th April - Pests & Predators with Adrian Connington 7th March - Frame building - 11am - 1pm St Mary's Church Hall
<u>Vale & Downland</u>
Friday 27th March - 7.30 pm Talk (will go ahead - speaker and venue tbc) Saturday 28th March - Red Barn Build Day
17th - 19th April BBKA Spring Convention - Bookings open

Seen around the internet

YLH The BBKA has been increasingly active in publicising the YLH issue (this was voted for by the Annual Delegates Meeting in 2025) and here is a nice page geeing us all up to be prepared in 2026:

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/news/yellow-legged-asian-hornet-monitoring-for-2026>

It has a link to the NBU page on YLH monitoring which is worth a read even though it is now a year old. Hopefully it will be updated soon. Worth noting that national policy is still for eradication rather than management. Once we move to management you will know things are really bad and the powers that be have given up. Hopefully we won't get to that stage.

Climate Change and Heat I found an interesting paper from the '*University of Chicago Press Journals*' on the effects of extreme heat on honeybee colonies. The study was carried out on bees in the Arizona desert (!) so you may think its not relevant to us. But the temperature at which things become really difficult is only 40C, and with climate change we are approaching that in the southern UK. Just something else for us to worry about 😊



<https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2026/01/260112214306.htm>

(For those short on time: heat shortens lifespan leading to declining population; smaller colonies have less capacity to regulate heat; water provision becomes essential)

Honey Labelling Another report on the BBKA's activity trying to get the UK to adopt better Honey labelling rules (the EU is ahead of us here and it is urging the government to adopt their rules).

<https://www.selondoner.co.uk/food-drink/28012026-uk-government-urged-to-adopt-new-eu-honey-rules-amid-fraud-concerns>

The new EU rules will be in force from June and mandate clearer labelling of the country of origin. This might finally be the end of 'a blend of EU and non-EU honeys' which you see on labels currently, which drives me mad and tells you absolutely nothing about where the honey comes from. As an aside, on the V&D beginner's course this year we had a comparative tasting between a real honey and a 74p jar of Sainsbury's 'Stamford Street' honey. Thankfully, everyone correctly identified the 74p jar, mainly because it neither tasted nor smelled of honey (weird golden syrup is how I would have described it). I mention this



© Sainsbury's

because it actually showed the honey origin as China which I have never seen before. I wondered if this was some early implementation of the EU regulations so it could be sold into Eire (just speculation). Was it actually honey, I couldn't possibly say, except I can't imagine how anyone could harvest, transport, jar and label and sell at a profit, 12oz of honey for 74p. I doubt Stephen Fry has this for breakfast

Honey Taste Test This last one might be behind a paywall, if so, apologies. It is a Daily Telegraph article on 18 supermarket honeys, including the one above and Tesco's Stockwell honey. Both received 1 star and were mysteriously both the same price at 74p. The Stockwell was described as 'Smells weirdly of warm Blu-Tack' and was also Chinese. Though maybe if warm blu-tack is your secret thing, this is ideal for you. The winner was M&S Collection Single Apiary Pure British Honey at £5 for 250g, described as having 'a heavenly smell redolent of rose and honeysuckle' and being 'a humdinger of a honey'. UK honey really is the best (especially from an Oxfordshire/Berkshire beekeeper)



© Daily Telegraph

<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/food-and-drink/features/supermarket-clear-honey-taste-test/>

For those that often criticise the BBKA (and I have done in the past) I think it's good to see from the above examples that they are actively working to support and further the interests of us beekeepers

Tips for March

My top tips for March

- Do not open hives for inspections unless it is sunny, the temperature is above 12C (at least) and the bees are actively flying. The oft quoted advice is you should be comfortable in a T shirt. (But as I'm from Leeds and comfortable in a T shirt down to about -5C this advice is dubious)
- Hefting is vital - I'd suggest weekly. If the forecast is for cold, then continue with fondant, but if warm (as above) 1:1 syrup is OK. Do not overfeed as this will stimulate the Queen to lay too much and the colony may not be able to support all that brood yet (I'm afraid this is definitely one of those 'it depends' areas rather than a time for solid rules)
- Once the risk of frost is over, mouseguards can come off. This will avoid congestion at a busy entrance and avoid some precious pollen being knocked off.
- Check entrances are not blocked by dead bees - this can be a killer.
- Consider a varroa treatment if you see evidence of varroa on inspection boards. It is your last chance before supers go on. I bought some trays of Apigard at Telford, and each colony will soon get one tray until I put supers on. This only for those who are paranoid about varroa (me).
- By the end of the month, you may be able to carry out a disease inspection - check for healthy brood. My colonies will also get a spray on each side of comb with a warm sugar solution with a bit of hive alive to 'pep them up'.

- **Forage Watch:** There is actually quite a lot for bees to collect pollen and nectar from just now.

Snowdrops (Galanthus): Finishing

Hazel Catkins: Finishing

Crocus & Hellebores: Still going

Cherry: Now in full flower in Steventon

Camellia: These are loved by YLH queens as an early source of nectar. If you know of some, check regularly to see if there are any unwanted visitors

Dandelions: Coming to your lawn by the end of March

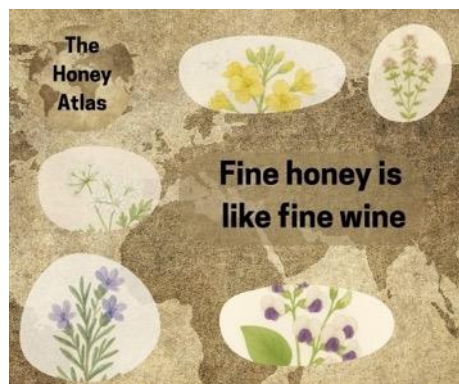


YLH Queens love Camellia apparently...
© RHS

Newbury & District BKA - Louisa Houghton & Rebecca Hall

NDBKA is setting up for a strong start to spring

February Members' Meeting – A Taste of The Honey Atlas



Our February members' meeting was a true test of the taste buds as we welcomed Ben from The Honey Atlas for an evening of honey tasting and discovery. Members sampled around 20 single-source honeys, exploring the remarkable differences in density, colour, texture and flavour.

From light, sweet borage and blueberry honeys (the latter with a surprising hint of blueberry) to the darker, more complex and slightly bitter horse-chestnut honey, the range demonstrated just how greatly the bees' forage influences the honey produced.

Ben also shared fascinating insights into the science behind honey production, explaining how nectar is transformed into one of nature's longest-lasting foods. We learned how glucose is converted into gluconic acid — giving honey its acidity — and hydrogen peroxide, which contributes to its natural antibacterial properties.

It was an informative and thoroughly enjoyable evening, combining flavour, science and a new appreciation for the diversity of honey.



Registering on Bee Base

Bee Base is an online resource funded by DEFRA, the Welsh Government and Scotland's Bee Health Programme. It's designed to help beekeepers maintain healthy and productive colonies. From honeybee related legislation to pests and diseases and how to recognise, control and treat them, Bee Base is your one stop shop for bee-related information. You'll also find plenty of downloadable publications and advisory leaflets.



Whether you're new to beekeeping, or have years of experience behind you, signing up to Bee Base not only gives you access to an extremely useful resource, but also puts you on the radar of the regional bee inspector who can help and guide you. For example, if you think your bees have been affected by a disease or pest, a visit from an inspector can be arranged. Inspectors have a wealth of knowledge and are there to help.

Registering with Bee Base also means you'll receive email notifications of threats and problems when they occur in your local area and you'll help Bee Base get a better understanding of the distribution of beekeepers and their apiaries across the country so that they can monitor and control the spread of serious honey bee pests and diseases effectively, as well as provide up-to-date information on keeping bees healthy and productive.

Please play your part and [sign up to Bee Base](#).

Signing up for Bee Craft Magazine

Established in 1919, BeeCraft is the UK's best-selling and international award-winning monthly beekeeping magazine, it's a great way to stay up-to-date articles on beekeeping practice, equipment, news and features from across the UK and around the world. It even includes features like how to cultivate your garden to support pollinators, honey recipes, beekeeping history, and beautiful honey bee art and photography.



You can subscribe for as little as £28 per year and there are lots of options around print or digital subscriptions, so there is something to suit everyone!

[Find out more.](#)



Spring Speakers

All events are held at St Mary's Church, Shaw-Cum-Donnington, RG14 2DR from 7.30pm – 9.30pm.

Managing swarming season with Stephen Greer – Tuesday 3rd March

Swarm control is widely considered the most difficult aspect of beekeeping, but mastering it is essential for maintaining strong, healthy colonies and preventing the loss of your bees.

The first part of this talk will focus on moving from panic to a plan when you find queen cells. We will cover Wally Shaw's "diagnosis before destruction" approach - teaching you to "read" the comb and help identify the colony's true intent before you act. You will learn:

- **The 3 R's:** How to distinguish between Reproduction (swarming), Replacement (supersedure), and Rescue (emergency).
- **The traffic light system:** A simple framework (Green, Amber, Red) to know exactly when to intervene.
- **Avoiding pitfalls:** Why "knee-jerk" tearing down of cells often fails and leads to queenlessness.

The second half of the meeting will cover practical techniques to control swarming without sacrificing your honey harvest. Our main focus will be a deep dive into the "Vertical Split"—a highly effective - equipment-light method that relies on manipulating colony biology rather than using complex kit. While the Vertical Split will be our primary

example, we will also touch on alternative approaches, including swarm control using a standard Nuc and the Snelgrove II (Modified) method.

Pest and Predators with Adrian Connington – Tuesday 7th April

A look at some of the most prevalent predators threatening apiaries, how they attack, and what defences bees and beekeepers can put up to repel invaders.

Preparing for swarm season: Join the Swarm Team or get on the recipients list

As the active beekeeping season approaches, the association is preparing for swarm season. We are looking for members to support this vital community effort, whether you are ready to collect swarms or simply willing to provide a home for them.

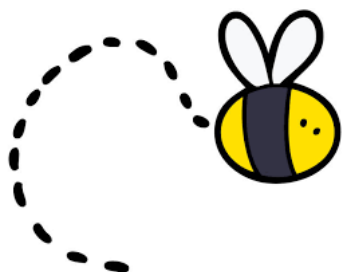
1. Join the Swarm Collection Team (volunteers) We are looking for members to assist with swarm collection. While experience is valued, you do not need to be an expert to join; less experienced members can learn alongside seasoned collectors. **Full details on how the team operates will be explained at the March meeting.**

- **How it works:** Volunteers are added to a WhatsApp group for real-time alerts. When a swarm is reported (often using what3words), local members are prioritized to minimize travel.
- **Donations:** While the service is free to the public, collectors are encouraged to request donations to the Association via the [Newbury Beekeepers GoFundMe page](#).
- **Interested?** Please complete the volunteer form here: [Become a swarm collector](#)

2. Can you offer a home to a swarm? (recipients) If you are unable to collect swarms yourself but are ready to provide a home for rescued bees, please join the [NDBKA Swarm List](#).

- **Step 1:** Read the **Swarm List Document** attached to understand the protocol.
- **Step 2:** Complete the [Swarm List Form](#) to register.

For questions regarding the team or the list, please contact **Mark** @ swarms@newburybeekeepers.org.uk



Share your stories!

If you have a great beekeeping story you'd like to share, we'd love to feature it! Please email **Louisa** at equipment@newburybeekeepers.org.uk.



Vale & Downland BKA - John Broadbent

A short update this month.

Beginners' Course

WE are cracking on with the Beginners' Course and have videoed a few sessions for those that have missed them. Beginners (and masochists) can catch up on me droning on here:

<https://www.nbtvscreen.co.uk/Valeanddownland.html>

This page includes a link to the Dave Bonner talk, which will be available for 1 more month. Thanks to Kevin who has created the videos and is hosting them for us - he is working on Friday's Asian Hornet discussion as I type...Please don't share the link - I have no wish to become an internet meme.....

February Talk 'All Things Asian Hornet' - Simon Rogers

On Friday the 20th of February, we held our first talk to the membership on the Yellow Legged Hornet (NBU terminology) or as the BBKA call it, Yellow Legged Asian Hornet. So, however you want to name it, doesn't really matter, what does though, is the effect it could have on this countries honey bee population and other invertebrates.

In January, John Broadbent and I attended a YLH seminar hosted by the Somerset BKA, the day involved talks and breakout sessions to share experiences and pass on so much helpful information all based of real experiences. Trying to do the day any real justice in a 2-hour talk, was never going to be achievable but, hopefully it has raised awareness for

those that could make it on the night of the impact any Hornet incursion would have in our area.

In total, 40 of our members did manage to attend and many apologies for those that couldn't had been received. Given the importance, the entire talk was filmed, and the plan is to give access to all the association members, to watch at their leisure. A big thank you goes out to Kevin Norton, who single handedly filmed the talk and has agreed to edit and host it on one of his servers. The plan is to make the entire PowerPoint presentation available on a separate communication.

I just want to re-iterate the actions from the talk that are currently being undertaken

- Define our geographical boundaries by engaging with our neighbouring associations.
- Involve the Regional / Seasonal Bee Inspectors.
- Re-launch and develop our AHAT team, looking for more volunteers or individuals that are prepared to give support.
- Split the AHAT team into three sub teams, looking for leaders in each sub team
- AHAT meeting to be planned in April at Red Barn.
- Identify high risk areas and set queen traps (Reading already do this).
- Every member that attended the meeting agreed to put a monitoring trap in their garden, details to be sent to me so I can populate the AHAT map.
- As a minimum, every member should be looking to put a trap in their garden and potential apiary sites. Please let me know if you do so, I can then allocate a monitoring square on the AHAT map.

This is very much first steps for us - John, Michael and I are just getting our heads around the software application, the geographical challenges we will be facing and the need for everyone in our association to play their part.

This is not a case of, well they are trustees and have been voted in or the AHAT volunteers, they should or wanted to do this. The Dover BKA really got onboard with proactively getting traps out and over 60 of their 120 members placed and monitored traps last year, feeding back findings to their and the NBU teams.

Here are some things you might like to consider-

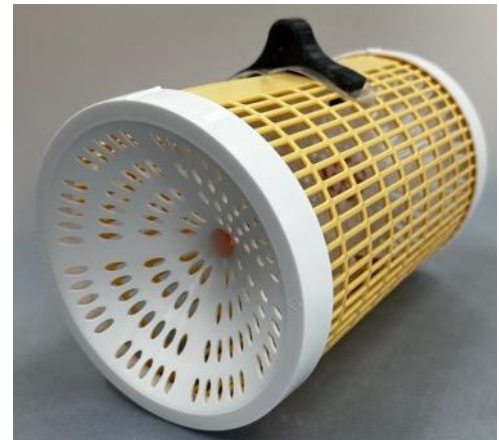


We gave away 30 of these monitoring traps at the meeting. This is an ongoing trial to see how people get on with them



Bait pod fitted to monitoring trap

- First YLH into the South of France 2004 / 2005, total French incursion 2014 / 2015.
- Potentially, one undiscovered YLH nest has the capability of producing 8,000 queens / nests within 4 years.
- Wrexham, one nest, emerged queen cells, identified on social media, who's to say there not more one off's, throughout the Country.
- I have committed to the trustees, that I will produce an article for the newsletter every month, updating actions and generally keeping the membership updated on what's going on locally and nationally.
- As I explained in the talk, there are 8 separate government bodies that cover the UK and Channel Islands, each have their own YLH mandates / policies. That said, the desired outcome of all these bodies is the control or ideally eradication of the YLH. Is it achievable? Who knows, only time will tell but, if we sit back and do nothing, we'll lose.



We continue to recommend the Gard apis trap for monitoring with minimal bycatch - but many more alternatives are available than even a year ago

Let's end on a positive note, Dover have proven it is possible to keep the YLH under control and they are only 20 miles from France (whom by the way had or have no formal legislation on tackling this invasive species)

John Note: If anyone wants one of the monitoring trap lids to try, just let me know as I have some spares (and can easily print more). The traps we displayed on Friday night will all be available for viewing at the Red Barn and we may be able to give out a bit more Trappit.

Build Day Reminder Don't forget that the Red Barn build day is on 28th March - a chance to come and meet other members, help the beginners and even make up some frames/boxes

Telford Beekeeping Show - John Broadbent

Early on Saturday morning I set off with Simon Rogers and Matt Frost to investigate this year's Telford Beekeeping Show. We didn't pay extra for the talk the night before and we only bought standard tickets, so we were let in at 9.30, an hour after the 'premium' ticket holders. The car park was almost full, and we could immediately tell that this was the busiest show we had seen since Covid. There was a short queue to get in, and we could see premium ticket holders heading to their cars with fully loaded trolleys. Slight worries that everything would be sold out were dismissed once we got in - there was still plenty of

stock to buy. (Note: by mid-afternoon, some popular items were sold out so you need to be decisive and buy early - or even better order before for collection at the show).

It was great to see so many beekeepers. I think the age demographic is definitely moving downwards which is good. Judging by the trolleys, there is no shortage of money either.



It was a busy show

The exhibitor demographic is also slowly changing. I think the (ludicrous) BBKA ban on exhibitors advertising queens or bees at the Spring Convention has caused many queen and bee breeders to move to the Telford show. This was good though - there was a panel of queen rearers in a discussion seminar, and I spoke to several of them out on the stands. Some were refreshingly frank about the state of queen rearing and how reliant it is on imports from the continent. Simon asked several what they thought a Buckfast Bee was nowadays and the answers ranged from honesty (just queens that have been selected from good stock) to complete bulls**t (queens specially reared following special strict rules - this from an importer bringing in open mated Italian queens. I refrained from asking what their 'strict' rules were.). They all said that beekeepers really want 'Buckfast' queens, even though many have no idea what that actually means nowadays. To be fair, I know some of the European breeders spend a lot of resource raising what Brother Adam would probably acknowledge as Buckfast bees, especially Denmark. So if you are buying from a queen rearer using Danish Buckfast breeder queens then you are probably getting the real deal.

Last year's trend of more Eastern European manufacturers (especially Poland) continued, and it was interesting to see the different equipment on offer. Several exhibitors had unusual (to me) plastic hives, which I'm not sure about and Techtron had a Polish polyhive very similar to the Abelo/Lyson one.

There were some bargains - packs of 11 made up brood frames were on sale for around £30, which was not unreasonable and Simon the Beekeeper had very reasonable prices on foundation (National brood pack - £8.45). All the exhibitors had 'show special' prices on Nucs, extractors, hives suits etc, with the added advantage that you could check the quality or try a suit on for size in a way you simply can't online.

My final visit of the day was to the stand of the inventor of the Gard apis (there were a LOT of other YLH traps on show). I didn't get the guy's name, but he is an English beekeeper living in the middle of France actively fighting the dreaded Hornet. In his case, necessity is very definitely the mother of invention, and he spent some time talking to me about his device (the surrounding body is simply half a Dadant plastic queen excluder cut in half). He has now made a simple plastic bottle attachment with a wick that you can fit that allows you to top up the bait without opening the trap. He has also made a 'ring' that clips onto one of the Gard apis ends which you then fit to a box to make a bulk hornet trap. Each GA trap can therefore make 2 bulk traps. Interestingly, he noted that the Hornets quickly adapt to traps, so you have to change them every 3 weeks. He also demonstrated a Gard apis fitted as a 'Chimney trap' - a brood box set up with some comb with a hole in the top cover, over which you fit a Gard apis as a chimney. Hornets enter

the 'hive' and then are drawn to the light from the top as the exit. They pass into the trap and are stuck. He claimed this idea works very well. Of course, I bought some examples and these will be viewable at the Red Barn later in the season.



Gard apis
external bait
bottle and clip
and ring cone
adaptor for bulk
trap

For me, this show marks the start of the beekeeping season - so I loved it ☺

Adverts

Jen & Matt - Selling a colony and kit

V&D BKA Members Matt and Jen are looking to give up beekeeping, after getting their first hive under the tutelage of V&DBKA in 2018. They currently have one complete hive of bees, with a blue queen, that is overwintering in Benson. The list of extra kit is too long to list here but includes 3 Thorne's National Hives (complete including 2 supers and frames). A 9-frame manual stainless-steel extractor, Nuc, Snelgrove Board, honey buckets, feeders, mouse guards, 8oz jars, home-made solar wax melter and 2 home-made stands (one single, one for 5 hives)

The full list is here:

<https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/16c1RGsLYNfkmHRaiEBwDNOXAvjLNT28uW5fo2WxUzSA/edit?usp=sharing>

Contact Jen by email: jennyskelton@hotmail.co.uk

Ben Tichband - SIPA Honey Bees Limited

We have Buckfast mated queens, virgins, Nucleus and full colonies for sale. We can supply on National or 14x12, alternatively as packages for top bar and other hive types. All our bees are raised in our own West Berkshire apiaries. We offer a 10% discount to members of NDBKA and VDBKA. info@honeybeenucs.co.uk

John Belcher

Please call John Belcher on 01189842321 or 07929586037 or email johnthebeeman8@gmail.com for bees, hive equipment, extraction supplies, feed, and general requirements for beekeeping, mostly in stock in Pangbourne RG8 7LB or available online from supplier.

Beckys Beezzzs Ltd

Nucs of bees, UK Bred mated queens, beekeeping equipment, bee feed & treatments beckysbeesonlineshop.co.uk 01264 351104

Please note: All Newbury & Vale members can place an advert free of charge for up to 3 months. Adverts should preferably be 5 lines or less.