THE BUZZ

Westerham Beekeepers'
newsletter

February 2025 | Issue Six

Welcome:

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2025! I hope that you all had a restful Christmas and New Year break and are looking forward to the season ahead.

Finally, our unpredictable weather has delivered something of a cold snap, a time when the bees can hopefully save their resources before starting the spring build-up.

This edition of "The Buzz" brings you the latest information about spring Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet trapping. There is also a review of Derek Mitchell's excellent talk on hive insulation, which I hope you all had a chance to enjoy either in person or through the recording made by Steve McGrath.

Sally provides an update on the BBKA's education programme, which provides opportunities for all of us to learn new skills and gain qualifications as beekeepers.

Topsy is our new coordinator for Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet (YLAH) matters and provides an excellent update on the spring trapping programme. We had an easy year last year, thanks to a miserable spring and summer which slowed the progress of the colonies that have already arrived in the UK. But we cannot afford to relax!

Steve McGrath gives us an update on his breeding apiary project. This is a chance for our branch to take a big step forward on both self-sufficiency of queens and colonies, as well as continuing the spread of colonies with hygienic traits. Good news for us as a branch, but Steve will need our support!

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Plus, many of the usual regular features. Enjoy the update!

Mark Waddington

Chairman's Chat:

This is the quiet time of year as a beekeeper, or is it the calm before the storm? Congratulations to those whose colonies are overwintering successfully. It is a nerve-racking period, especially for beekeepers who don't treat. There are ways of maximizing winter survival chances, but the actions (autumn feeding, insulation, bringing strong colonies into the late season) are mostly past.

If your bees haven't made it, you will have a chance to restock with the help of others, through the swarming season, or (heaven forbid), by buying a new colony. This is a good time for all of us to be cleaning equipment and making preparations for the months ahead.

If your colonies are overwintering successfully, the next couple of months are critical. On the one hand, we don't want to open up and inspect too early. On the other hand, the bees will need monitoring and top-ups of fondant. Spring is unpredictable at the best of times, but the bees will progress even if the weather is tricky. It is worth being ready for swarm prevention or management.

Please consider doing spring YLAH trapping if you aren't doing so already. We don't know when the incursion will accelerate, but we can help by being vigilant as a branch, both for our own bees and for others. We have suitable traps available and a ready supply of Trappit bait. Let's get as good a coverage of our region as we can.

Mark Waddington

Things to do:

March is generally when the apiary starts becoming active for the season ahead, depending upon the weather, so it is a good time to start some pre-season prep.

Here are some recommendations of jobs for the upcoming month:

- Heft your hives, checking stores and add fondant where necessary.
- Check that your hive entrances are clear of dead bees and/or debris.
- Prepare your hive records – get new sheets or book ready. You can download a hive record card from Our Westerham Beekeeper's website.
- Change hive floors if you haven't already done so, clean and place back into position.
- Remove mouse guards and woodpecker protection.
- Prepare and clean brood frames, make up new frames ready for replacing old, damaged comb when the weather warms up, and you can make a full inspection.
- Prepare supers and queen excluders.
- Plan any planting and tidy up the apiary
- Check all your equipment. Clean and make any repairs.
- Think about the water source close to your hives for the season ahead - ponds, birdbaths etc.
- Put out your YLAH traps and check them regularly.
- First inspection once the weather is warm enough. Minimum temperature should be 14C, not too windy and some blossom flowering.

Nicola Spreckley

What's On – Recent talks, dates for the diary, & future events:

Wednesday 29th January 2025 – Derek Mitchell - Thermoregulation in hives:

Derek Mitchell gave a fascinating talk at the January meeting. A video recording is available here, but note that it will expire at the end of February. Please do not share the link.

Derek and his partner talked about the importance of insulation, offering tips on how we can improve our beekeeping by helping our bees to maintain a steady temperature. Derek, whose background is as a mechanical engineer, did his PhD on the subject of thermoregulation in hives.

Wooden beehives are inherently cold in winter; aluminium sheet only 0.5mm thick will lose less heat than the skin of a wooden hive. The natural beehive in a tree void would be much smaller with thicker walls than a standard hive.

Bees need to maintain the internal hive temperature at a steady 33c to 35c whether by heating or cooling. As

beekeeper, we can help our bees by insulating the top and sides of our hives, filling in the gaps on nucs and hives, filling in the space above the top bars, plugging gaps in nucs designed for feeding, and avoiding draughts around the varroa board (but allowing for any water in the hive to drain away).

The target should be no space above and no draughts below

Mark Edwards

Forthcoming Events:

Please save the following dates in your diaries, for what should be entertaining and informative talks to round off the winter season.

All are held at:

Westerham Hall
Quebec Avenue
Westerham
TN16 1BJ

Talks start 8.00 pm with doors opening at around 7.30 pm.

Winter Talks:

Wednesday 26th February 2025 – Tom Bickerdike - Southeast bee inspector and Asian Hornet catcher

Wednesday 26th March 2025 – Sarah Wyndham Lewis - The work of a honey sommelier

Mark Waddington

Membership:

We're approaching half-way through the Membership year which runs from 1st October to 30th September each year and I thought an update on the membership numbers might be of interest.

We currently have 119 members split as:

- 67 Registered members i.e. full members, with all the benefits of BBKA membership, including disease insurance, 3rd party public liability insurance, product liability insurance and monthly magazines Beecraft and BBKA News, plus access to the wealth of information available at the Training Apiary and our WhatsApp and Facebook groups.
- 40 Friend members i.e. without all the BBKA benefits of full membership, but with Training Apiary access and access to our WhatsApp and Facebook groups.
- 2 Junior members.
- 1 School member.
- 9 Partners of Registered members.

Numbers have fluctuated recently, but this is usual during the winter period, with several members leaving for various reasons, and generally with more joining. If you have bees, but are not full members yet, please consider upgrading; the various insurances and numerous articles in the magazines are well worth it.

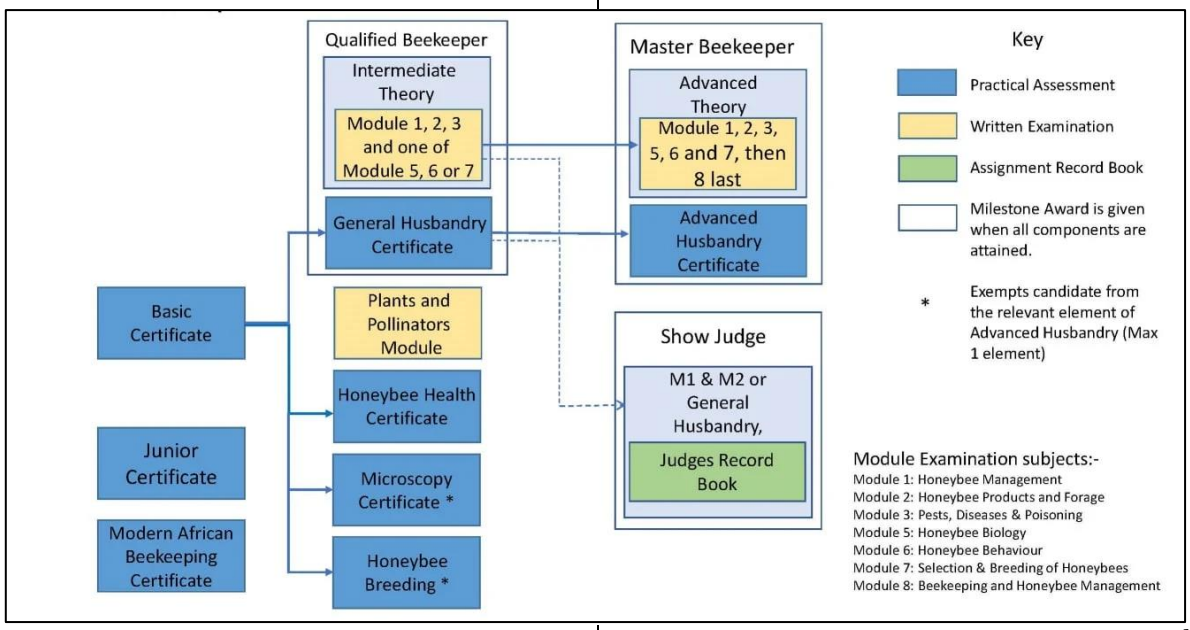
Robert Ambroziak

Beekeeping Learning Options:

The BBKA has been updating its learning platform which is open to all BBKA members. There are various options open to those who want to become a better beekeeper through practical or written learning (see study map below). The BBKA learning platform also contains helpful resources, past BBKA magazines and talks.

The new learning platform opens study groups and materials to all, helping beekeepers through each topic over six or seven weeks. The study materials have been updated and are used by both study groups and correspondence tutors. The study groups are free and have the benefit

of weekly zoom sessions going through answers to questions in a group of 10 to 25 students. The correspondence courses allocate a tutor to an individual (or a group) at a small cost (c £75). The tutor will mark your answers to the questions.



BBKA Exam Framework

Photo: Steve Riley

What is even more exciting is that Steve Riley has been involved in changing/updating the syllabi for Module 3, 6 and 7 papers to cover varroa resistance. The new syllabi will be in place for the November 2025 exams.

Steve's photo shows Varroa resistant hygiene traits on the inspection board; chewed-out pupa exoskeleton in January & February informs the beekeeper that the bees are interrupting varroa reproduction at an early stage of the year (and that the queen was laying around fourteen days earlier).

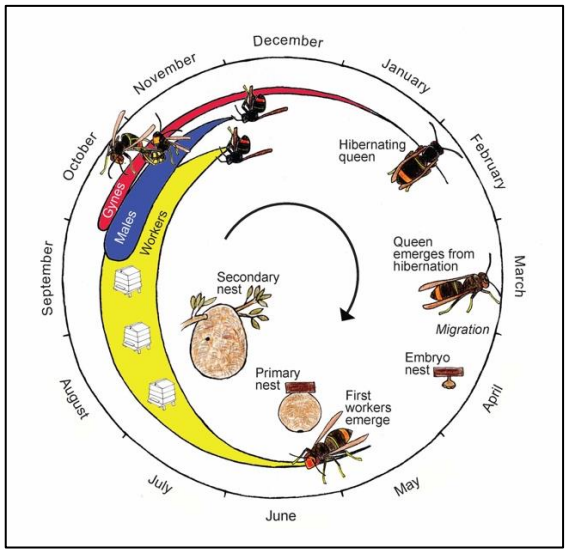
Please do get in touch with either Steve or me if you are interested in learning more. Steve is currently teaching a group the excellent Basic assessment course, which is a great introduction or refresher to the essential knowledge for beekeepers. The modules and other practical skills expand this essential knowledge. You will be amazed what you will learn.

Sally Doyle-Linden

Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet:

Photo: Topsy Rudd

It is time to start putting our traps out for Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet (YLAH) queens. From the life cycle diagram below, queens start to emerge from hibernation in early March and indeed two YLAH queens have just been found emerging in Jersey. Temperatures here are rising and while we are further north than the Channel Islands, we should start preparing our traps and getting them out.



Reproduced with kind permission of Dr Sarah Bunker, author of The Asian Hornet Handbook

Last year we gave out Pharma traps with extra holes drilled in the black lid to let other insects out. Advice given to us by Sarah Bunker, author of The Asian Hornet Handbook, is:

As far as avoiding by-catch goes, using a small amount of attractant absorbed into a foam disc helps. Escape holes aren't brilliant, but 6-mm or 7-mm holes as high up as possible, and as many as you can put in without affecting the integrity of the jar is good. And roughening the outside and inside of the plastic around the escape holes with sandpaper can help insects haul themselves through. Getting volunteers to release insects at least once a day from traps is the best way to avoid killing native insects.

If you have a Pharma trap that we gave out last year, please try to drill some extra 6-7mm holes in the green body of the trap, near the top, following Sarah's guidance. Then use sandpaper to roughen the plastic, put a lump of sponge in the base and soak it in Trappit. Hang the trap somewhere sunny where you will pass by it every day, as this will remind you to release any other insects inside daily. The photo shows a trap with an extra hole in both sides.

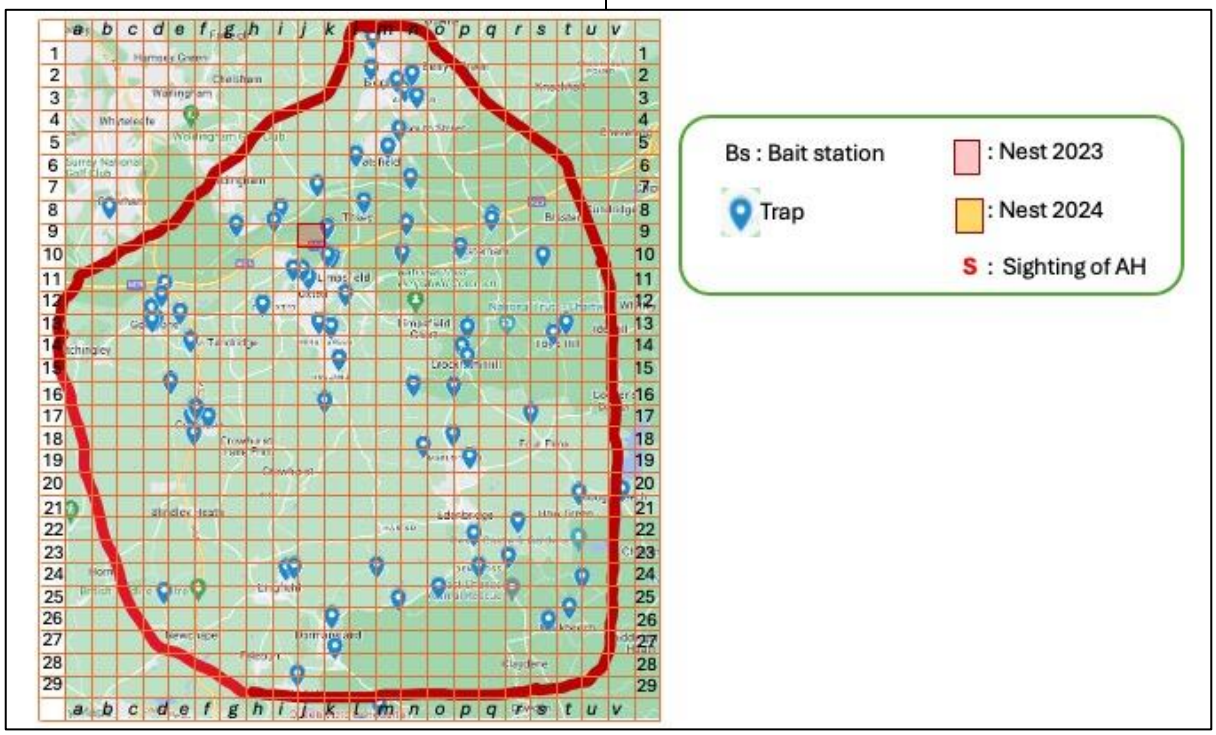
If you need a trap, the bait Trappit, or want us to drill more holes in your existing trap, please contact Topsy Rudd or Mark Edwards via the Westerham beekeepers WhatsApp group. **We will bring spare traps, Trappit, and lots of YLAH posters to the meeting on 26 February at Westerham Village Hall.** If you would like some Trappit, please bring a jar or bottle with a watertight lid.

Photo: Topsy Rudd

Please note that the **NBU will not attend unless they have a photo of a YLAH** so if you do capture one in your trap, or indeed see one on a bait monitoring station, please take a photo making its characteristic markings as clear as possible. Then report it via the Asian Hornet Watch app

Our trap distribution last year is shown on the map below – if anyone can fill in any

geographical gaps so that we can get good trap coverage across our patch, that would be much appreciated! Please notify us via the WhatsApp group of your new trap location with a what3words location. If you had a trap last year but are unable to put one out this year, please also let us know so we can remove your location from our mapping.



Westerham Beekeepers' YLAH Monitoring as at 17 April 2024

Photo: Topsy Rudd

We are keen to get the YLAH posters given out to anywhere that will put them up, particularly garden centres, schools, village halls, supermarkets, leisure centre, golf clubs etc. Please take some at the meeting on 26 February, or else contact us and we can post some out to you.

Topsy Rudd

Bee Keeping and Social Media:

I have recommended several podcasts over recent months and I'm sure you have enjoyed listening to a few of these.
To mix things up a little, we thought that we would recommend two good groups/people to follow of Facebook and Instagram. I have listed one from each media and hope that you might look them up, if you feel that they may be of interest to you.

Facebook – No Nonsense beekeeping

This group was recommended by one of our fellow newsletter team members as they are an interesting group that discuss all sorts of bee topics, problems and allow followers to assist each other in their bee keeping.

Instagram – One queen.ro

These guys post great videos of bees, varroa mites, honey, wax making and more. Even though they are not in the UK is, great to see some of the images and videos they post. And, if you look here, you'll see the prices they can charge for their vintage honeys.

Nicola Spreckley

Prize Winning Honey Recipe: AGM November 2024

Lemon & Honey Ice Cream:

Ingredients:

2 eggs – yolks and whites separated
50g icing sugar
150ml double cream
Zest & juice of 1 lemon
1 tablespoon soft honey

Method:

In one bowl whisk egg whites, adding icing sugar until the stiffness of meringue mix.

In second bowl beat the cream, folding in the egg yolks, to the consistency of whipped cream.

Combine both bowls, folding in the lemon zest, lemon juice and honey.

Pour contents into a small loaf tin or plastic take-away container and freeze.

NB: the finished ice cream contains raw egg.

Diane Pickard

The Art in Beekeeping:

Artist Beekeeper Garnet Puett (photo opposite) produces "apisculptures", using metal, beeswax and colonies of live bees. His bees are his collaborators, tiny performance artists that live for a few months inside an art gallery, and then return to a more traditional hive.

Sally Doyle-Linden

Photo: Andrzej Kramarz

Looking Ahead:

If you are wondering what to do when the much looked forward to the summer draws to a close, the Weald & Downland Museum in West Sussex is running two interesting one-day courses next September:

Photo: Dr Sara Robb

Honey & Beeswax: Super Natural Cosmetics Formulations

Photo: Dr Sara Robb

History of Bee Products in Pharmaceuticals & Cosmetics

Sally Doyle-Linden

Breeding Apiary:

My first update from the bee breeding apiary and project is a call for volunteers. As we head into late winter and early spring, we've been busy planning for the season ahead, and I will definitely need more help in what's set to be an exciting year of colony expansion and data collection and analysis. The Marshalls have already helped me a lot, but can you spare a couple of hours every fortnight or even once a month this spring and summer to help me bring this project to life for the benefit of all our members?

It'll mean mucking in with jobs around the apiary like maintaining the area (it's prone to wildness as it's surrounded by great forage like bramble), and then helping me with the management of the colonies (we don't want these colonies to swarm) and the queen breeding programme itself and assisting with the data collection and analysis. You'll get lots out of it I'm sure, including learning and inputting on queen rearing techniques and new things like genetic testing of bees and more.

As we head into late winter and the first pollen-bearing flowers lure the bees needing fresh food for colonies that should now be expanding once more, we have four of the five colonies that went into winter. We lost one hive to either queen failure (she was a 2022 queen) or possibly viral load. The other four colonies (three nucs and a hive) are looking good and I'm optimistic we'll get off to a flying start when the weather warms up. We haven't lost the genetics of the hive that we lost as I still have her

daughter, so we will re-introduce that line into the apiary.

Out in my own apiaries, I can already see the colonies that have started building back up from what's going on to the bottom boards. It's full of information. You can see wax cappings from emerging brood (darker), wax cappings from opened honey stores (lighter), bits of pollen, and in the varroa resistant colonies signs of chewed out pupae as they start the hygiene process. I'm still hefting regularly because we are now getting into the period where colonies can run out of food as they need to feed their growing brood chambers; weather and pollen/nectar sources can all work against them at this time of year.

As far as plans go, we'll be heading into spring with four colonies, and we'll be looking to do early observations on each plus genetic testing for M, C and L lineage before selecting which we will breed from this year.

Once selected we'll be looking to raise a good number of queens from each using a couple of different methods, so we're heading into next winter with between 15 and 20 colonies. That'll put us in a great position for 2026 assuming most of those come through next winter.

While the project won't likely have queens or colonies to offer to members this year as we build it out, we do want it to start benefitting members. So, I will be running a small-scale queen rearing course one Saturday in late May or early June. Come along and learn to raise your own queens from selected colonies and how to support them as they get mated and through the early days and months of building a new colony. It'll be a practical session in the apiary, so you'll get hands-on experience of the methods. If you register interest by emailing me at steviemcg12@yahoo.co.uk or via Whatsapp, I'll send you more details on what we'll be covering.

By the next update from the apiary, we'll be into the season and the project will really be under way.

Steve McGrath

About Westerham Beekeepers:

Westerham Beekeepers is a branch of the Kent Beekeepers Association. Our aim is to promote the craft of beekeeping by helping to educate both beekeepers and the public. While we are mostly practising amateur beekeepers, membership is open to interested members of the public. We meet during the winter months in Westerham, usually for lectures by visiting specialists and our own members. During the active beekeeping season, we meet for demonstrations by experienced beekeepers in our members' apiaries.

Website: https://westerham.kbka.org.uk

Contact Information:

Mark Waddington – Chairman & Events Programme - contributions for newsletters and ideas for winter talks & summer visits wbka.events@gmail.com

Steve Riley – Education steveriley91@gmail.com

Robert Ambroziak – Membership members.westerhambeeks@gmail.com

Jacky Delooze – Training Apiary wbkatrainingapiary@gmail.com

Topsy Rudd - Branch Secretary & YLAH Co-ordinator westerhambeekeepers@gmail.com

Andrew Smith & Sue Bradshaw-Smith – Librarians & Fete Team Organisers wbkalibrarian@gmail.com

Keith Masters – Treasurer masterskeithmasters@hotmail.com

To join the Westerham Beekeepers' WhatsApp group, please contact Mark Waddington

To join the Training Apiary's Facebook group, please contact Jacky Delooze

Committee Members:

Mark Waddington – Chairman & Events Programme

Topsy Rudd – Branch Secretary & YLAH Co-ordinator

Keith Masters - Treasurer

Jacky Delooze - Training Apiary Manager

Steve Riley - Education Officer

Robert Ambroziak - Membership Secretary

Alban Smith Brindle - Swarm Co-ordinator

Peter Cobley – Branch representative on KBKA Council

James Cash - Branch representative on KBKA Council

Advice for Beginners & FAQs: on our website

Swarm Reporting: Please contact our swarm co-ordinator, Alban Smith Brindle on 07919 843 546, or the nearest contact from the BBKA website if Alban is not available.

Last Word: Grayanotoxin
is the main diterpene component of rhododendron nectar which bees process into so-called Mad Honey. Mad Honey in small doses is said to induce light headedness and hallucinations, but larger amounts can cause cardiovascular problems, nausea, vomiting, loss of consciousness, and even death. Read more about Mad Honey here.

Photo: Duchy of Cornwall