The Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers' Association Newsletter

April – June 2026

Charitable Incorporated Organisation - 1183025

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Note From The Editor

Hello.

As the new season begins, everything suddenly feels full-tilt again, colonies waking up, kit checks underway, and the teaching apiary gearing up for another busy year. It's that familiar spring momentum, equal parts excitement and preparation, as we all settle back into the rhythm of working with our bees. Here's to strong colonies, steady progress, and a smooth start to the season for everyone.

Please remember to share your photos, ideas and newsletter items – I have even written a little poem to aid on page 2 😊

Gemma

Notes From The Chairman

Please enter at least one of the Suffolk Show classes. Entering is fun and competitive! Preparing your entries is a great way to sharpen your skills and showcase the wonderful range of honey bee products. The Show schedule is available on the Suffolk Beekeepers' website.

The I&ES Beekeepers' Safari, an all day tour of four apiaries in NW Ipswich, will take place on Saturday 13th June. Reserve the date, as places are limited.

A reminder on Income Tax: if you take £1,000 from your beekeeping activities, you should declare it to HMRC. Keep records and claim expenses.

Finally, EARS continues to support the PhD student running the Sting Tolerance Research Project. For more information on EARS please talk to me.

Regards, *Jeremy*

Teaching Apiary Update:

By Phil Ramsey

The Teaching Apiary will start weekly sessions on Sunday 26th April 2026. Like the format we had in 2025, we have fourteen experienced beekeepers on hand to take all beginners, intermediate and experienced beekeepers through the Teaching Apiary hives. We have a full syllabus that will blend a short tutorial before being hands on in the hives. This year we have a few practical topics like Nuc management, Queen rearing, live honey extraction that have been added to the agenda.

We are finalising the sign-up page on the new website so that you can register your place each week. This greatly helps the assessors know who will be joining us so we can get the most out of the session.

Bee Safari:

On Saturday 13th June 2026 IESBKA will be holding its annual Bee Safari. It's a one-day session that you really don't want to miss. We visit several local apiaries in North Ipswich with the Bee Inspector (David Burns) and get the benefit of looking through colonies of bees with David and get a flavour of what a bee inspector is looking for with regards to healthy bees.
If you wish to attend, please apply to phil_ramsey1@hotmail.co.uk to reserve your space. Numbers will be limited to 25. Further details to follow.

Ask a Beekeeper Zoom:

We're hoping to run our informal fortnightly Zoom chats again this summer, offering a friendly space to talk bees, ask questions, and share support. We'll discuss the plan further at the Kesgrave meeting, but if you'd like more details, please contact salthurlow@gmail.com.

The Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers' Association
Newsletter

April – June
2026

Zac Blackmore's Guide to the Perfect Jar of Honey

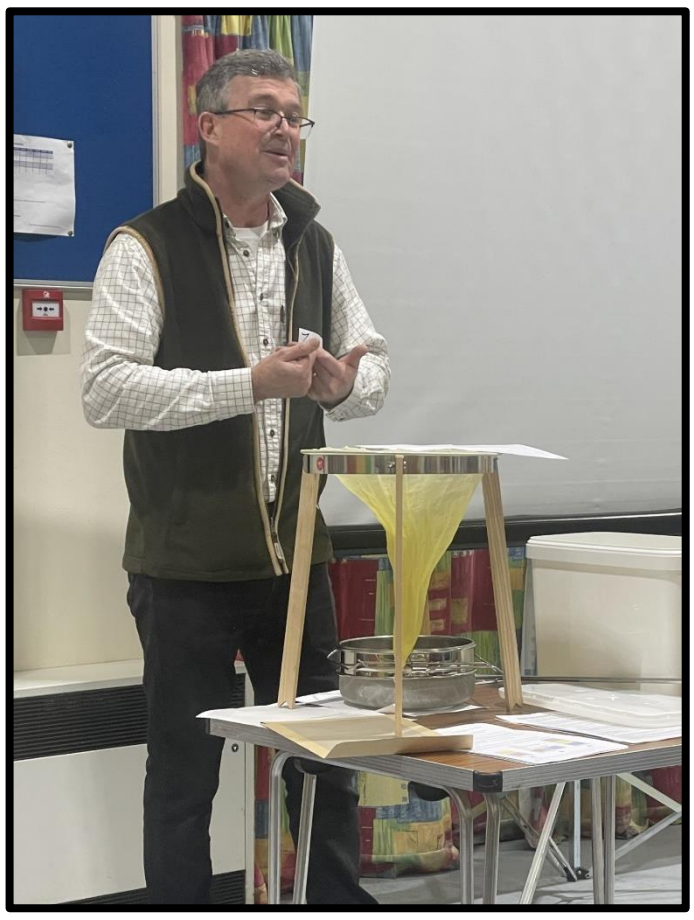
At our recent monthly meeting at Kesgrave, we were delighted to welcome Zac Blackmore, who shared his expert insight into preparing the perfect jar of honey, especially for competitions. Zac reminded us that success in the show tent isn't just about having great honey, it's about presenting it with care, precision, and an understanding of what judges look for. His advice was practical, reassuring, and full of those small details that make all the difference.

Zac emphasised that runny honey should be beautifully clear, with no crystals beginning to form. If it has started to granulate, a gentle warm water bath at around 58°C for an hour will return it to its best.

Jars should be filled right to the top, with spotless glass and a pristine lid, no smudges, no stickiness, and absolutely no stray wings or wax flecks.

He also encouraged beekeepers to "know your crops": early spring or oilseed rape honey is best entered as creamed, while naturally crystallised honey is perfectly acceptable when presented correctly.

Above all, Zac reminded us that competition honey is as much about education as it is about winning. Showing the public the natural variety of honey, runny, creamed, or crystallised, helps celebrate the true diversity of what our bees produce.



Hive-Side Training

The Hive-Side Training (HST) programme is a government-funded initiative aimed at enhancing the skills and sustainability of the UK beekeeping industry.

Through this contract with the Animal & Plant Health Agency (APHA), the Bee Farmers' Association is providing regional, hands-on sessions across the country to improve bee health and management standards.

https://hivesidetraining.org.uk/

The Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers' Association
Newsletter
April – June 2026

BBKA Update

Asian Hornet Monitoring: Key Update for 2026

Following the unprecedented rise in confirmed Yellow-legged Asian Hornet nests during 2025, the BBKA is urging all beekeepers to remain highly vigilant as we enter the 2026 season. Overwintered queens will begin emerging in early spring, making the next few months critical for early detection. Queens are often seen feeding on early flowering plants such as camellias, and small primary nests may appear in dry outbuildings, starting as small as a golf ball before rapidly expanding. With several late season nests destroyed last year, certain regions are now considered higher risk for overwintered queens, and early reporting will be essential.

Beekeepers are encouraged to monitor their apiaries closely, watch for foraging hornets, and report any suspected sightings through the Asian Hornet Watch app or via email with clear photos and location details. Many successful identifications in 2025 came from public submissions, highlighting how vital community awareness remains. The BBKA stresses that 2026 will be a pivotal year: swift reporting, accurate identification, and coordinated monitoring efforts give us the best chance of limiting the spread of this invasive predator and protecting our pollinators.

National Call to Halt the UK Insect Crisis

The BBKA has joined more than 100 environmental organisations urging the UK Government to take stronger action to address the rapid decline of insects. The coalition is calling for a national Insect Action Plan focused on habitat protection, reduced pesticide use, and long-term monitoring.

For beekeepers, this is a timely reminder that the pressures we see in our apiaries reflect a wider ecological crisis. The BBKA encourages members to stay engaged, support local conservation work, and help raise awareness of how vital insects are to the UK's food systems and biodiversity.

BBKA's Basic

This year applications to take the BBKA's Basic must reach our County Examinations Secretary, Mark Dua (**examsec@suffolkbeekeepers.co.uk**) no later then Thursday 30th April.

Many long-standing beekeepers wonder why they should bother with the BBKA Basic when they've already spent years learning through the hive, the seasons, and the inevitable stings along the way. The truth is that the Basic isn't about proving you can keep bees, you already do that every time you open a colony. Instead, it formalises the knowledge you've built through experience and gives you a recognised foundation that supports good practice across the beekeeping community. It's also a friendly way to refresh areas we don't always revisit, from disease recognition to the reasoning behind certain management choices.

For those who enjoy sharing their skills, the Basic opens the door to mentoring, teaching, and progressing to the more advanced BBKA modules. Many experienced beekeepers say they were surprised by how enjoyable the assessment was: more like a relaxed conversation at the hive than an exam. Taking it isn't about starting again; it's about honouring the craft you've developed and helping strengthen the standards that keep our bees healthy and our associations thriving.

Contributions Welcome

Contributions to the newsletter are always welcome – it is your newsletter so let me know your ideas.

Send me your pictures related to bees and beekeeping and I will try to include them in future editions.

I also welcome articles about your beekeeping adventures. Email me at **gemmaparrott@hotmail.com**

What do you call a bee that can't make up its mind?
A maybee!

Upcoming Speakers

We have some fantastic speakers and activities at the Kesgrave meetings in the future, including some overseas experts, via Zoom.

We encourage members to attend in person, but hope to share online access details for selected talks.

Speaker suggestions are welcome - **davidparrott@hotmail.com**

Prof Heather Mattila	April 26
Auction	Sep 26
Roger Patterson	Oct 26
Stewart Spinks	Nov 26
Christmas Activity TBC	Dec 26
Hawk Honey	Jan 27
David Evans	Feb 27
Fincham Farm	Mar 27
These are subject to change	

BeeBase

www.nationalbeeunit.com

The National Bee Unit database is something that all beekeepers are strongly encouraged to register with.

BeeBase is the place to register your apiary and your colonies and where you can update the status of your colonies and meet the new legal requirement to report whether or not there is Varroa in your apiary.

BeeBase is also a good source of advice for beekeepers and in particular a reference point for information about pests and diseases.

The Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers' Association
Newsletter
April – June 2026

The Beekeeper's Tasks for the Next Few Months…

IESBKA's Objectives

1. Promote and further the craft of beekeeping

2. Advance the education of the public in the importance of bees in the environment

The Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers' Association
Newsletter
April – June 2026

Why honeybees overthrow their queen

This article is taken from Lune Valley Beekeepers and remains their copyright.

It sounds like the plot of a medieval historical drama: A once-powerful monarch, weakened by illness, is overthrown by her previously loyal subjects. But in honeybee colonies, such high-stakes coups are not just fantasy, they are a common occurrence that comes with both risk and reward for bee colonies and the food systems that depend on them.

Known as supersedure, the process occurs when the tens of thousands of worker bees in a colony sense their queen is no longer laying enough eggs and coordinate to replace her with a new, healthier queen. While this survival strategy helps wild colonies adapt, it can spell trouble for managed hives, leading to gaps in egg-laying, weaker colony populations and ultimately less pollinating and honey production.

Now, researchers at the University of British Columbia (UBC) have made an important discovery that illuminates why these violent revolts occur and how they're coordinated with such remarkable synchronicity. Published recently in PNAS, (Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences) the research team found that common viral infections shrink a queen's ovaries, reducing both her egg-laying capacity and her production of methyl oleate, a pheromone that normally keeps workers loyal. When methyl oleate levels drop, workers will "smell" the queen's weakness and begin preparing for her successor.

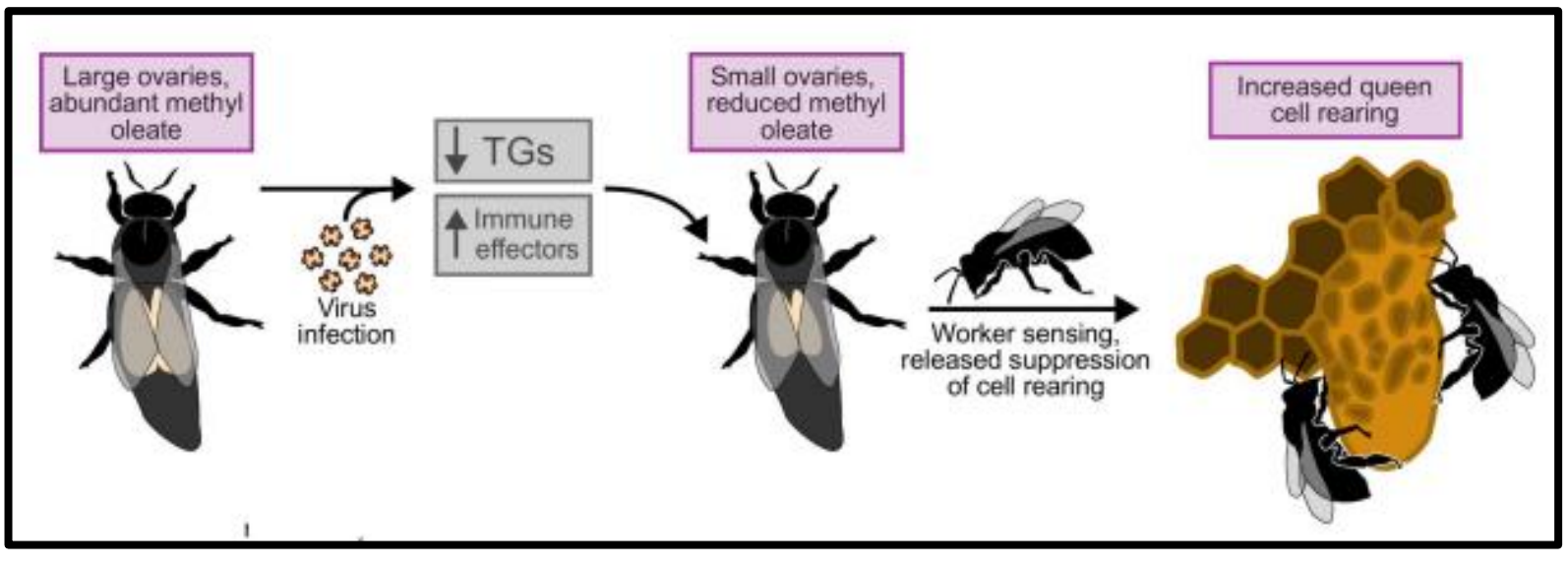
A healthy queen can lay as many as 850 to 3,200 eggs per day, which is more than her whole-body weight," said senior author Dr. Leonard Foster, a professor of biochemistry and molecular biology at UBC's Faculty of Medicine and Michael Smith Laboratories. "But in our experiments, virus-infected queens laid fewer eggs and produced less methyl oleate. That pheromone reduction seems to be the signal to workers that a queen is no longer fit to continue."

Bees pollinate about one-third of the world's crops, making them essential to healthy food systems, food security and the health of people and communities worldwide. Beekeepers have been reporting problems with queen failure and premature supersedure for many years, with recent surveys identifying "poor queens" as the most frequently reported cause of overwintering losses.

"Our research really emphasizes how virus infections in queens can be a major problem for beekeepers," said first author Dr. Alison McAfee, a research associate at UBC's Michael Smith Laboratories and North Carolina State University. "Previous studies showed that failing queens were heavily infected with viruses, and now we know that those infections can lead to supersedure, which is risky for the colony and expensive for beekeepers to manage."

The research also highlights the role of varroa mites, parasitic pests that can spread the viruses linked to queen failure, underscoring the importance of keeping colonies healthy and parasite-free. Queen infections are so far an underappreciated problem, said Dr. McAfee, who hopes that this research will change that. "Keeping the queen healthy is one more reason why it is so critical to think ahead and keep varroa levels under control," Dr. McAfee added. "There is currently no treatment for viruses in honeybee colonies, but now that we better understand their impact, we can change the way we manage Varroa to give the queen a better chance."

The hypothesis in this research is that virus infection causes reduced ovary size and reduces the production of pheromones. The smaller ovaries coincide with reduction in triacyglycerides (TGs) which are essential energy stores for egg production. Queens with small ovaries secrete less methyl oleate which is a pheromone which usually suppresses queen cell raising by workers. When the workers sense lower methyl oleate levels they start raising queen cells to replace the failing queen.



The Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers' Association
Newsletter

April – June 2026

Hive Safety: Protecting Our Bees and Preventing Theft

By Gemma Parrott

Hive theft is something none of us ever want to face, but sadly, it does happen, and it has happened close to home.

Graham and Marika, WSBKA Apiary Managers sadly reported a theft from their association's apiary. The padlock had been removed from the entrance gate, and two occupied polynucs were taken. The winter straps securing them to their stands were still in place, but the nucs themselves had gone. The four National hives on site were all found fully strapped and untouched.

So how can you keep your own hives safe?

Perhaps the most important reminder is this: polynucs and small hives are very easy to move. That makes them convenient for us, but unfortunately also attractive to thieves. A few practical steps can make a real difference:

1. Secure Your Stands and Hives

- Use heavy-duty strapping to fix hives to stands.
- Consider anchoring stands themselves to the ground.
- Make access routes less obvious: hedging, fencing, or natural barriers help.

2. Lock Up Where Possible

- A locked gate is a strong deterrent.
- Use quality, weather-resistant combination or keyed locks.

3. Use Smart Tracking

Many beekeepers are turning to discreet digital trackers, such as:

- Bluetooth tags, hidden inside lids or under floors.
- GPS devices, for remote out-apiaries or valuable nucs.

These devices won't stop theft, but they greatly increase the chances of recovering stolen colonies and act as a strong deterrent when advertised.

4. Reduce Visibility

- Keep hive numbers modest in exposed areas.
- Avoid posting exact hive locations on social media.
- Screen your apiary from public footpaths where possible.

5. Mark Your Equipment

- Use permanent, clear markings with your initials or association number.
- Consider branding, carving, or UV pens to mark boxes and lids internally.
- Distinctive equipment is harder to sell and easier to identify.

Saints of the Apiary: The Patron Protectors of Bees and Beekeepers

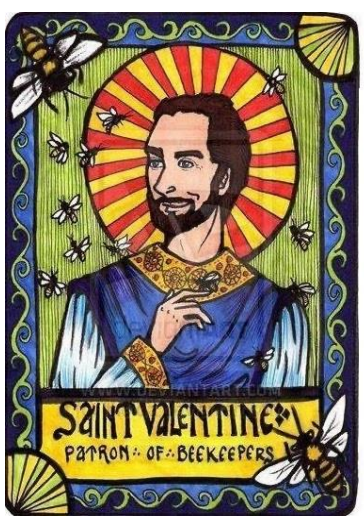
Across the beekeeping world, several saints have long been associated with the protection of bees and the guidance of those who care for them.

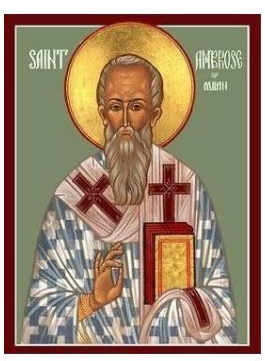
The most prominent is St Ambrose of Milan (340–397 AD), often depicted with a beehive thanks to the legend that a swarm settled on his cradle and left honey on his lips, a sign, it was said, of the expressiveness he would grow to possess. His feast day on 7th December is still marked by beekeepers in many countries. Alongside him stands St Valentine, whose links to spring, fertility, and the safeguarding of hives have made him another symbolic protector of bees.

Ireland brings its own beloved figure to the apiary: St Gobnait (or Abigail), a 6th-century saint celebrated for her healing work and her deep connection to bees. Stories tell of her using honey as medicine and calling upon her bees to defend her community.

Together, these saints reflect the long-standing bond between spirituality, the natural world, and the craft of beekeeping, a reminder of the respect humans have held for bees for centuries, inspired by their hard work, their sweetness, and their essential place in our lives.

By Gemma Parrott





The Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers' Association
Newsletter
April – June 2026

Meet Some of Our Committee Members...

Sal Thurlow

Role in Committee: I coordinate the mentors and mentees and look after the IESBKA Zoom account, setting up meetings for members to chat, for others groups like Suffolk Show Committee, and our study groups.
I also co-organise the Felixstowe Bee Group, along with several others, I coordinate the Bee Breakfast, Coffee and Chat winter monthly meet-ups, I help out at the teaching apiary and I generally interfere where I think I can help

How long have you been beekeeping?: 6 or 7 years so far

Your beekeeping story: Geoff, my husband, started, when we first moved here from Essex in 2004, but every year we lost our bees. So when I was coming to retire in 2019 I suggested we do it together (as all our other hobbies and activities were separate!). Naturally, we bought kit and bees before we knew what we were doing, although Geoff had completed Jeremy's excellent beginners' course some years previously

Your top beekeeping tip: I'm going to take a liberty and offer 3:
1 - don't believe the person getting rid of their bees when they say they are really nice bees but... our experience is that they are really bees too angry to sell and require a lot of effort to bring them back from this
2 - my top tip is to have a "cup of tea" moment when you go to your bees, planning to do one thing, and find them in a different state. So - Don't panic, take a breath, re-plan based on what you have found, (ask the WhatsApp group if you are not sure) and you will succeed. If not immediately, just give it another go
3 - Cleanliness is next to healthy bees so keep your suit, boots, gloves, tools and equipment clean and give your bees the best chance of thriving.

Phil Ramsey

Role in Committee: Teaching Apiary Manager

How long have you been beekeeping?: I've been beekeeping on my own since dad died in 2021, so I'd say 5 years.

Your beekeeping story: Dad, Roy Ramsey, had been a beekeeper all his life starting when he was 8 yrs old until he died aged 86. From a very early age I started to take an interest in beekeeping and would spend hours with him in at various apiaries. When it was swarming season, as a young teenager I would regularly cycle to wherever local swarms were and take them in a skep in readiness for Dad to pick up when he got home from work. Through out the years I'd help Dad with pollination, a huge task of taking 50-60 colonies into commercial fruit orchards for a few weeks and then taking them out when the blossom was going off. The spring and summer honey harvests were always a busy time and benefitted from their being two of us.
In the latter years Dad got slower, his health deteriorated and my help increased to the point I was starting to take over. His 1:2:1 tuition and coaching from all those years of experience really came into its own. I was a sponge for his knowledge and he pushed me hard. When Dad passed away, it was the same time of my early retirement, so I naturally took over the bees as my new occupation, 5 years ago.

Your top beekeeping tip: Get yourself organised and make up a Nuc as early as the season allows. This is an insurance policy. If something happens to your existing colonies a Nuc will get you out of trouble.

The Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers' Association
Newsletter
April – June 2026

Understanding Bee Stings: What Science Really Says

By Gemma Parrott, adapted from Bee Haven Facebook page

Few topics spark as much debate in beekeeping circles as the question of whether honey bees can sting more than once. Most of us were taught early on that a worker honey bee dies after stinging, but every so often, a conversation pops up insisting otherwise. Recently, this discussion resurfaced, and it's a perfect opportunity to revisit what the science actually tells us.

Worker Honey Bees: Why One Sting Is Fatal

Worker honey bees are equipped with a barbed stinger, imagine a tiny fishhook designed for defending the colony against large, soft-skinned mammals. When a worker stings a human or other mammal:

- The barbs lodge firmly into skin
- As the bee pulls away, the stinger, venom sac, muscles, and part of the abdomen tear away
- The detached stinger continues pumping venom for several seconds
- The worker dies shortly after due to the abdominal damage

This is not a matter of opinion or beekeeping philosophy, it's a matter of anatomy.

Stinging Other Insects vs. Stinging Mammals

Honey bees can sting more than once, but only under very specific conditions.

When a worker stings another insect:

- The exoskeleton is hard, not elastic
- The barbs don't become embedded
- The stinger can be withdrawn cleanly
- The bee survives

This is why workers can engage in defensive battles with wasps or robbing bees without dying in the process.

Queen Bees: A Different Design Entirely

Queens are equipped with a smoother, less barbed stinger. This allows them to sting repeatedly, but their stinging behaviour is highly specialised.

- Queens primarily sting other queens
- Their stinger is used in supersedure battles or during colony establishment
- Queens rarely sting humans
- Even when they do, they can withdraw the stinger and survive

In other words, queens can sting multiple times, but they almost never use this ability on beekeepers.

What About Wasps and Hornets?

Unlike honey bees, wasps and hornets have smooth stingers and can sting repeatedly.

This difference often fuels misconceptions when people assume all stinging insects behave the same way.

To Conclude…

- Worker honey bees sting mammals once and die
- Worker honey bees may sting insects and survive
- Queens can sting more than once, but rarely do—and almost never toward humans
- Wasps and hornets can sting repeatedly
- Claims that worker honey bees can sting humans multiple times are not supported by biology

Beekeeping is full of tradition, intuition, and personal experience, but when it comes to stinging behaviour, the anatomy speaks for itself. Understanding these differences helps us handle our bees with more confidence, compassion, and clarity.

Let's keep learning together and supporting one another in the craft we love.

The Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers' Association
Newsletter
April – June 2026

Highlights from Olga's Talk at the Kesgrave Meeting: Demaree Method

A huge thanks to Olga Hammond for an excellent session on her Demaree method. These are just a few notes on what was said.

Olga covered the history of the Demaree method; a popular, non-destructive swarm control technique that was developed by George Demaree in the late 19th century. Its primary purpose is to stop strong colonies from swarming by breaking the swarm impulse while keeping the colony at full strength for honey production.

Olga explained her method of splitting colonies vertically.

When to Split?

- Books often advise splitting when the first queen cell appears, but Olga emphasised this is usually too late, as the colony has already committed to swarming.
- A vertical split is most effective once a colony reaches around 7–8 frames of brood.

Pros

- Highly predictable, no unexpected swarms.
- Can lead to a large honey harvest, especially in strong nectar flows.

Cons

- You may have to feed, as a large number of bees consume a lot of stores.
- Risk of chilling in the bottom box if the weather turns.
- Drones can become trapped, as they may not be able to exit from the bottom box. Some beekeepers suggest adding an entrance at the top box, but Olga does not recommend this, it overstimulates the queen as bees pass her on their way out.

- The queen becomes very busy, so requeening annually is advised.
- Vertically stacked boxes can be heavy, tall, and harder to manage, this method suits a confident, experienced beekeeper.

Olga's Demaree Timing Guide

Day 1

- Colony is overcrowded with 7–8 frames of brood.
- Perform the Demaree split.
- Ensure at least one frame of open brood remains with the queen.
- Olga emphasised that if charged queen cells are already present, it may be too late to Demaree.

Day 7

- Inspect the colony.
- Confirm the queen is laying in the bottom box.
- Destroy all queen cells in the top box.

Day 28

- Inspect again.
- If weather has been good, the colony may now be ready for a second Demaree, or the top box may already be heavy with honey.

Thank you Olga for a brilliant, helpful session!

Bee Health Day – Sunday 26th April 9am – 3.30pm

Bee Health Day, Sunday 26h April, Dallinghoo Village Hall IP13 0JX 0900 - 1530.

While this is principally for those on the Introductory Course, other members are welcome. David Burns, Bee Inspector, will be there and we will cover a variety of basics including how best to inspect a colony.

Anyone wishing to attend who is not currently a member of the Introductory Course is asked to inform Jeremy of your intention: JeremyQ@tiscali,co.uk.

Bring your own sandwiches.

The Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers' Association
Newsletter

April – June 2026

Calendar of Events

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

Members of the six Associations which form the Suffolk Beekeepers' Association are welcome to attend any or all these meetings/events.

If you do not belong to that particular local association, please introduce yourself to that BKA secretary.

Please note that these are subject to change – we will email / What's App any changes where possible before.

Date	Meeting / Event	Details
Wed 1st April	I&ES Monthly Meeting	Prof Heather Mattila – How honey bees protect themselves from hornets
Sat 11th April	Bee Breakfast	Venue: The Anchor, Stratford St Mary - 10am Message salthurlow@gmail.com for info
Thurs 16th April	Felixstowe Group Monthly Meeting	Kirton Recreation Pavillion. 7.30pm
Fri 17th to Sun 19th April	BBKA 2026 Spring Convention	Harper Adams University, Shropshire, TF10 8NB
Sun 26th April	Teaching Apiary - Wherstead Park IP9 2BJ	The Teaching Apiary starts today for weekly sessions on a Sunday 2 – 4pm
Sun 26th April	Dallinghoo Village Hall IP13 0JX	Bee Health Day 9am – 3.30pm – to book email JeremyQ@tiscali,co.uk
Wed 27th & Thurs 28th May	Suffolk Show	https://suffolkshow.co.uk/
Sat 13th June	Bee Safari	Email phil_ramsey1@hotmail.co.uk to reserve your place as limited spaces
Sun 9th Aug	Teaching Apiary - Wherstead Park IP9 2BJ	Last Teaching Apiary session.
Wed 2nd Sept	I&ES Monthly Meeting	Auction of surplus equipment
We are hoping to run a family BBQ near the end of summer at the Teaching Apiary. More info to come soon – watch this space!		

The Devon Beekeepers' Apicultural Research Group (DARG) has been running various trials for many years. Their current one is to look at the choice swarms make of the different cavity volumes their scouts find. The more who join in, the better the trial conclusions.

It isn't difficult - just put out boxes (hives) of different sizes (first measure the volume) & check to find when a swarm takes up occupation. Anyone interested contact David Channon: dpchannon@gmail.com

Request for National Nuc

I'm looking to purchase a National nuc in the Campsea Ashe area. If any local beekeepers have strong, healthy nucs available this season, I'd be very pleased to hear from you.

Please get in touch with details of availability and price: will.sheppard@hotmail.co.uk or **07730 091 476**.

Local Suppliers

Box House Beekeeping Supplies

In East Bergholt, Suffolk - for the local supply of hives, frames and foundation, tools and other equipment for keeping bees

Open by arrangement - please email or telephone Paul White to discuss your requirements.

01206 299658 or 07768 634038
www.box-bees.co.uk; email: sales@box-bees.co.uk

Richard Martin Beekeeping Supplies

A large range of stock including hives in the flat, WBC, National and Commercial; frames and foundation, honey jars, buckets, tools, bee suits, veils, and gloves. Agent for Thorne's of Wragby

Little College Farm, Creeting St Mary IP6 8PX

Opening hours: 1 April - 30 September 4pm - 7pm Mon - Sat.

At other times, please call on **01449 720491.**