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[A4 page to print off if you are
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Cumbria Bee Times – Over to You:
Shall We Dance?
Bee Ambassadors & YLAH

Future Editions.

Welcome to the March edition of the Cumbria Bee Times. There was a good hint of spring warmth & sunshine last week. 'Ne'er cast a clout till May be out' is perhaps one of our more ambiguous proverbs but the gist of it is well applied to our beekeeping; the fickle weather that we are likely to experience over the next few weeks requires us to keep a close eye on our bees. They still need stores that they can access – that means that sugars in some semi-solid form need to be close to the bees and their growing brood nest. Margaret Murdin spoke to Penrith BKA in February and emphasised the colony's need for pollen at this time of the year telling us that she feels now is the all-important time to feed pollen supplement or substitute. Many sources report that honey bees, given a choice, tend not to forage close to their hives postulating that they may have evolved behaviour that helps to 'hide' the colony from predators. However, I have no doubt that early spring forage such as snowdrops, crocus & hellebores are vitally important to all our pollinators and our honey bees do access them when close to their colonies. Early and late forage in our gardens also provide a vital supplement to pollinators using agricultural land. Note to self: plant more bulbs in the autumn and find space for more pussy willow. Finally:-

Please respond to the updated Varroa questionnaire in this edition.

Editor: Julia Hoggard Kendal & S Westmorland BKA & Cumbria BKA
(Views expressed in this newsletter are those of the editor & contributors and do not necessarily represent those of the CBKA).

Dates for your diary:

•**Excursion** to Northumberland
Honey Co. + Chain Bridge Honey
Farm : Sat 16th May 2026
•**Autumn Convention**
(Cockermouth): 12th Sept 2026
•**Honey Show** : Sunday 15th
November 2026 :
Evergreen Hall, Bluebell Lane,
Penrith.CA11 7LH

[This is the link if you want to
order YLAH postcards &
business cards from the NBU
https://forms.office.com/e/jbTN0FSPiv](https://forms.office.com/e/jbTN0FSPiv)

cbteditor@gmail.com

March Edition – Main Theme (NOT EXACTLY ABOUT) Supporting and Teaching New Beekeepers!

The cbteditor@gmail.com inbox has remained stubbornly empty on my proposed main theme topic so the next (June) edition of the CBT will include a questionnaire about what readers want from the CBT and indeed whether they read or want the CBT at all. Supporting new beekeepers across the county enters the 2026 season now so it seemed to be an appropriate topic but no copy has come in. However, there is now an opportunity for a more eclectic mix.

Professor Steve Martin came to talk about 'Varroa Resistant Honey Bees and Monitoring Varroa' in mid-February. Kendal & South Westmorland BKA hosted the day in Brigsteer Village Hall, the audience came from across Cumbria, west Yorkshire and north Lancashire. From an organiser's point of view it was challenging – SNOW. Steve lives near Lockerbie and had planned to stay in Brigsteer the night before the talk but had to change his plans and flew to his home from Ireland the night before instead. Several attendees had difficult journeys and when Steve was due to start speaking he was still snowed in at home. Plan B worked for us, Andy Brown, YLAH coordinator updated us and prepared us for the new 'YLAH season 2026', Steve arrived, grabbed coffee and a biscuit and delivered a brilliant day for us despite long journeys and a snow stressed exit from his home. My strong impression was of information very well presented, Steve is a very approachable speaker and the loud buzz of conversation at lunch time suggested the social aspect of the day went really well too. For anyone who could not join us in February Steve's talks are available on line and there is information on <https://www.varroaresistant.uk/>



Andy Brown updating us on YLAH



Prof. Steve Martin (R) talking to Dick Towler

Ahead of the day a questionnaire was circulated to attendees as they booked, obviously this went to a skewed selection of beekeepers. We have modified the questionnaire a little bit having learned from the original that responders needed some more options. It does not take many minutes to complete, please would you complete it for us **even if you responded to the February one**. We would like a wider look at what is happening in the county. <https://forms.gle/Qoo7mHyYwpEsyEes9>

Dick Towler follows up on the day in his article below.

Encouraging Varroa Resistance in Cumbria

Members of Kendal & SW Beekeepers set up a WhatsApp Group last year to enable the sharing of photos and data regarding possible Varroa resistance in their apiaries. Following Steve Martin's inspiring visit to us last month, members have been invited to become part of a group of beekeepers committed to working together to establish Varroa resistance, basically following the example of Westerham Beekeepers, as set out by Steve Riley in his book 'The Honey Bee Solution to Varroa'.

Members of other Cumbrian beekeeping associations are very welcome to join this group. Indeed, a couple of members of Keswick Beekeepers have already done just that.

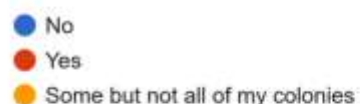
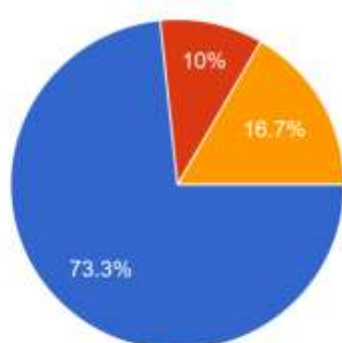
Working towards Varroa resistance does involve some commitment, particularly initially, as beekeepers have to gather evidence to establish the Varroa resistance status of each of their colonies. Resistant colonies will generally produce low Varroa counts and be able to identify the presence of Varroa in sealed brood cells, enabling the bees to uncap and remove infected pupae. Uncapped cells will be visible during inspections and parts of chewed out pupae may be present on Varroa boards. Once colonies have been identified as either Varroa resistant or susceptible, queens can be raised from the former and introduced into the latter. Also, drone production can be encouraged from resistant colonies and discouraged from susceptible ones. The application of miticides must be avoided as much as possible, other means of reducing Varroa populations, such as queen frame trapping or brood removal, being used instead. Colony losses due to Varroa may be higher initially, but should be much lower once Varroa resistance has been established.

If anyone would like to work with this group, either to establish Varroa resistance in their colonies, or to help other members of the group establish Varroa resistance in theirs, please email Dick Towler, dicktowler49@gmail.com.

Dick Towler Kendal & South Westmorland BKA

Do you think you already have some colonies of Varroa Resistant Honey Bees?

30 responses



Questionnaire Response from Social & Learning Day Audience. Now Let's Look Right Across Cumbria please:-

[Please complete the new questionnaire](#)

<https://forms.gle/Qoo7mHyYwpEsyEes9>

All the responses to the first questionnaire are available here

<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1mps0ht4JzTgxsLMCNEjSXGyV35UqJb1kMW9XyujDHTI/edit#responses>

Beekeeping Association Historical Records A Valuable Part of Our Local History.



The Cumbrian Beekeeping Associations all have their own records, all tell a tale of our beekeeping history, climate, how our associations came into being and how they were structured – the women nearly always made the tea and cakes! Some of the associations are over 100 years old, Kendal, a relative youngster has just celebrated its 80th anniversary.

Kendal & South Westmorland Beekeepers' Association passed some of its records to me many years ago. An impending house move set me thinking about where these documents should go to next. Years ago I had had a very positive experience dealing with the then, Kendal Records Office. Whilst working on the conversion of Meathop Hospital, the old tuberculosis treatment sanatorium near Grange-over-Sands, a plumber found a box containing record books of patient admissions to the hospital in the 1950s and 60s, the box had been left behind in a cellar. Conscious of medical

confidentiality he brought them to me, his then GP and gave me the box. The records were emotionally very moving, evoking both pathos and a sense of how life once was with this omnipresent and grim disease. The notes were all contained within the cloth spined hard covered record books familiar to us from childhood and later years. My memory is that each patient, adult or child, had an entry spanning the two pages across the open book just 2-3 lines deep. Columns and rows were hand ruled. Date of admission, name, age, date of birth and address were recorded, and then body weight on admission - many were young adults in their 20s and 30s and weighed just 7 or 8 stones (44-50kg), so much lighter than we are nowadays. A column contained a record of the money the patient had with them – usually just a few shillings, rarely a pound or two (1 shilling = 5 pence). Some recorded an occupation. The final column recorded an outcome and date; just 2 options - discharged or died – many had died very young. Amongst the entries I found the sister of the farming family by our home, she had died young. My dilemma was what should I do with this information – it had made a huge impression on me but clearly contained confidential information. The Kendal Record Office was both keen to take on this box of records and could handle the confidentiality issues. This felt like a win-win situation, a tiny piece of our local history conserved and cared for. The whole episode made a lasting impression on me, the historical content of the record books, the emotions they evoked and the fact that we have a repository for such precious pieces of our local history staffed by people who could not have been more helpful.

It crossed my mind that our beekeeping association's records could perhaps be stored in the Cumbria Archives as they are now known. An email to the Kendal Archives Office received a positive response along with the Terms of Agreement for the Donation or Deposit of Records. We discussed this option at our committee meeting and it met with approval. Four of the committee recently took all our records to the office to discuss options and see whether what we had was of interest. The whole episode was almost uniquely positive in the era of cut backs, struggling to sort life's issues out (almost always on line) and dealing with bureaucracy. We met with one of the Kendal archivists, we were warmly greeted, it was clear that our records were considered a valuable small piece of local history. We were told they filled an archives gap in Kendal history. We were able to deposit them where they would be cared for and insured, we would be able to access them and indeed borrow them back for up to 3 months should someone want to study them and should future members of our association wish to change the status quo and remove the records that could be done. In due course the records would be catalogued and we could view them electronically at will. If our experience is of interest to other Cumbrian Beekeeping Associations Barrow, Carlisle, Kendal and Whitehaven all have Archive Centres. Details are available here:

<https://cumbriaarchives.org.uk/welcome-cumbria-archives>

Julia Hoggard Kendal & South Westmorland BKA.

Yellow- legged Asian Hornet Update.

What's the Fuss About Yellow-legged Asian Hornets?

(update March 2026)

"Asian hornets are a non-native invasive predator of medium to large insects. They pose a serious threat to our native pollinators and, throughout the summer, honey bees can make up a substantial part of their diet as they build their nests up to several thousand individuals."

Animal and Plant Health Agency, DEFRA, UK GOV

Update on National Position

Sightings :

2025: 163 nests from 544 sightings (includes the empty nest found on 5 Jan 2026 at Wrexham, N Wales).

2026: credible sighting of a YLAH in Doncaster, S. Yorkshire (NBU 26 Feb).

Government: Policy is still to eliminate YLAHs and their nests. DNA analysis by FERA will continue, however the National Bee Unit (NBU) will no longer participate in spring queen trapping as there is very low payback for the cost of effort involved in early-season monitoring. [NBU inspectors will shift their focus back to inspecting apiaries for other diseases (e.g. AFB, EFB) and pests (e.g. the developing threat of Tropilaelaps)].

Risk Areas: The Bee Health Advisory Forum / FERA have shared results from the DNA analysis done to identify areas in England and Wales where there may be a higher risk of overwintering YLAHs. Data from all the nests found in 2023 and 2024 were used to predict which nests in 2025 were more likely to have released reproductive drones prior to destruction. Those destroyed later in the year (on or after 30 Sept) had an increased probability of producing reproductive drones, so these areas are considered to be of a higher risk. A map highlighting the risk areas has been generated and as might be expected, the higher risk areas are clustered in the south-east with a couple of areas on the S. Dorset coast. Remember this is just a tool; YLAHs do not necessarily follow the rules!

Local Position

So far, no sightings of YAHs have been reported in Cumbria, but how closely are we looking? Feedback at the National AH Coordinators meeting stated an increase in public reporting, particularly in SE England, due to efforts to raise awareness and educate the public. We need general public awareness to spot this invasive species; we cannot rely solely on beekeepers.

Identification of nests (in southern counties) has been facilitated by improved technology which tracked hornets to nests using tiny transmitters fitted to individual YLAHs. This reduced the time taken to locate the nests which could then be destroyed.

Cumbria Asian Hornet team, CAHT



We have a team of volunteers who are willing to monitor and identify a YLAH if one is reported. These volunteers make up Cumbria Asian Hornet team, CAHT. We have a webpage, which has a wealth of information about the YLAH and is accessible to everyone.

Visit www.kendalbeekeepers.com/caht and we have a WhatsApp group which receives regular updates from BBKA on the UK 's evolving YLAH position. (BBKA = British Beekeepers Association)

Andy Brown from Kendal & South Westmorland BKA is our website administrator and can also add you to the WhatsApp group.

If you would like to be involved and join Cumbria Asian Hornet Team, CAHT, please contact one of our County Asian Hornet Coordinators via cumbriaaht@gmail.com . It's FREE to join 😊

What can we do?

- **Educate ourselves and others**
- Know how to identify a YLAH
- Know how to report a sighting (via the Asian Hornet Watch App or www.nonnativespecies.org/asianhornet).
- Join CAHT WhatsApp group for up-to-date info and you can also ask questions

Prepare for sightings in Cumbria

New Technology Development: the “Buzzcopper”

This is a remote-monitoring device which could be a game-changer for our less densely populated county. It uses an AI-camera to identify whether the visitor to a non-killing bait station is a Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet or not and then sends a photo to your phone. It has a battery, recharged by a small solar panel, and has been demonstrated to be over 99 % reliable and is very affordable (Costs approx. £25 per unit). Mk II should be available in June and Cumbria has ordered 15 initially. We may be able to build our own from a pack of components more cheaply in future. Our plan is currently for coordinators to issue to relevant volunteers based upon area threat and reports.

Future Direction

Although BBKA are currently driving and coordinating volunteer beekeepers' responses in support of the NBU to address the threat of Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet, the likelihood is that a nationwide, dedicated association that includes non-beekeepers is the way forward. Such a body would need the support of DEFRA, be independent of beekeeping organisations, could have charitable status and attract donations, be dynamic and could garner non-political support in local government. This will be developing across the country over the coming months and may build on that which supports the AHA Catch application.

Asian Hornet Alert, AHA, is a voluntary group which includes non-beekeepers as well as beekeepers. They have an app called AHA Catch which shares communications and links up volunteers. There is strong encouragement for all volunteers to join AHA Catch via the app. Registration can be found at <https://catch.asianhornetalert.org.uk/login>

Cumbria County Coordinators

Andy Brown (K&SWBKA) covers Kendal & South Westmorland BKA, Sedbergh BKA, Furness BKA. Clare Woowat represents Cumbria Beekeepers Area Association (CBKAA). These are Carlisle, Cockermouth, Kendal, Penrith, Whitehaven & District BKAs. There is a single page printable QR coded page that you can use to access the apps or to put up as a poster for the public when you have an event publicising the YLAH. It is at the end of this CBT issue. (JH – Ed)

Report sightings (via the Asian Hornet Watch App or www.nonnativespecies.org/asianhornet).

Clare Woowat Asian Hornet County Coordinator for CBKAA , Vice-President, Cockermouth BKA



Cumbria Bee Times – Over To Cumbrian Beekeepers.

Shall We Dance?

You might all remember the days when you gazed at the dance floor hoping somebody would get up and start the party.



Even worse were the days when you danced and nobody joined in....

Well did you know that in every one of our hives the bees have an actual dance floor? It's usually on the first frame just inside the entrance and it's here that a forager or scout bee starts her famous waggle dance signalling to her sisters where the nectar/pollen/water is.

Before we get into unravelling the dance did you know that she might have to demand her inactive sisters' attention? It's a common misconception that our bees are busy ALL the time... but they aren't!

In the busy summer months every hive has a group of middle aged bees just milling about having down time. They might patrol the hive begging for some nectar from the nurses or just rest. It's the hive's way of having an available army of willing foragers ready when a big source of nectar or pollen becomes available.

The dancing bee's problem then, is how to get her sisters to pay attention!

It must be frustrating when she is bursting with the excitement of her nectar bonanza so what does she do?

She climbs on their backs and gives them a jolly good shake!

Bees don't only communicate by observing dances...they use vibrations and sound.

Our busy forager pushes her head against her sister, grabs her by her feet and climbs on her back and vibrates her abdomen up and down. It's a type of dance known as the Dorsoventricular abdominal vibrating dance as she uses her large dorsoventral flight muscles to make the vibrations.

She will do this over and over until her sisters pay attention to her dance indicating where the forage is.

If the source is within 100m of the hive she does a simple round dance, going round in a circle and then coming back on herself. All the time she offers her watching sisters a sample of the nectar by unfolding her proboscis and giving the watching bee a drop of nectar onto hers. If the source is further than 100m (but only just) she will do an intermediate dance called a sickle dance but if it is further then she will perform her waggle dance.

The dance is an amazing way to communicate the distance, quality and direction of forage. It is performed in the dark and on the vertical face of the comb. For the dancer the vertical always represents the sun and she will circle to one side then another with a straight run in between famously wagging her abdomen from side to side. The direction of this run represents the angle of

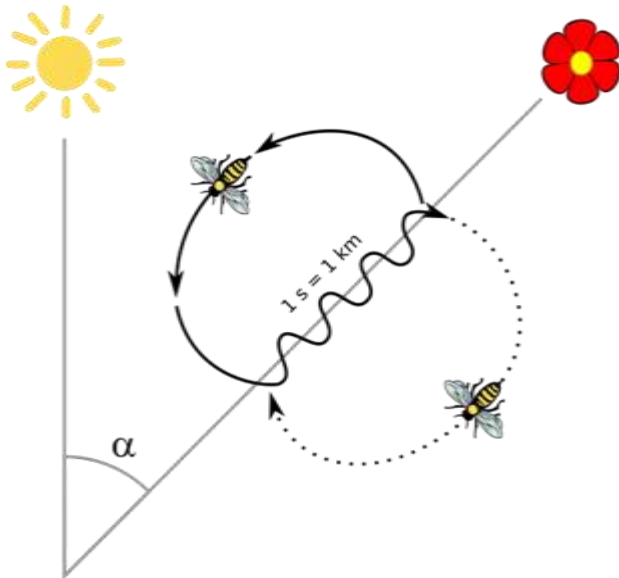
the forage to the sun. The number of waggle runs she makes represents the quantity of the forage and the distance of the waggle run indicates the distance to the forage.

She will continue to give samples to her watchers who in turn become very excited emitting little vibrational squeaks and doing little buzzing runs where they buzz their wings and run through the other bees encouraging them. The dance has an amazing level of accuracy and our force of foragers quickly find the source and will return again and again until the source is depleted.

There are many other fascinating forms of communication and dancing within the colony. This is just a small insight into the marvellous and fascinating world of our bees.

El Mason

Member of the Cockermouth/Keswick Associations BBKA Module study group.



By Own work - File:Bee dance.pngFile:Sun01.svgFile:Abeille-bee.svg by Emmanuel BoutetFile:RosendeutschschweizerBlatt.svg by Kilom691, CC BY-SA 2.5, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=15242410>

Mindful Walking & Bee Watching? Just a Thought.....

A very recent trip to do an evening talk for Ormskirk BKA gave me the opportunity to spend a sunny day at Rufford Old Hall (cover photo). Walking round the gardens I became aware of lots of insects flying round me, many were settling on the tree trunks beside me. Standing still and concentrating allowed me to 'tune in' and realise these were solitary bees, there were hundreds of little holes in the ground beside the garden paths and hundreds of mining bees. It took me ages to get good enough photos to record the bees on iRecord and then attempt some sort of count to add to the record – I decided - 500+ bees. What intrigued me was that in all the time I was there seemingly none of the other walkers and passersby (and there were many of them) noticed anything unusual: no one paid any attention to all these lovely insects. As beekeepers we have lots of knowledge, can make ourselves ambassadors for all pollinators, not just honey bees and share the ability to just stand and enjoy BEES, flowers, warmth and sunshine. Maybe also take the opportunity to pass on knowledge about YLAH – we are depending on members of the public spotting these invaders and reporting sightings. Please make sure we all have the Asian Hornet Watch App on our 'phones with its useful images to show people.

JH Ed. Andrena clarkella – Clark's Mining Bee at Rufford Old Hall with crocuses – vital early spring forage. March 2026 JH Ed

(A.Clarkella uses willow flowers & basks on tree bark).



The next edition of the CBT is due in June 2026.

The closing date is always by the end of the month preceding the edition – so, end May for the June edition please.

It would be very good to hear what beekeepers across the county would like the CBT to cover.

We are constrained by the data limit on information we can circulate via eR2. In a 2026 edition we will focus on a Cumbrian BKA.

Edition No. 32 – June 2026.

Work in progress – I hope some information on Cumbria's wild bee populations and learning to identify our common bumble bees.

Happy Easter



Honey Bees Visiting Crocus Spring 2025 The flowers provide both nectar & pollen
vital early forage for all our bees.

Thank you to all the contributors to this edition of the CBT.

PLEASE RESPOND TO THE
VARROA QUESTIONNAIRE

<https://forms.gle/Qoo7mHyYwpEes9>

New Version – now
Julia has got the
hang of Google
Forms!

Please join us in the hunt for Yellow-legged Asian Hornet

Asian Hornet Watch to report sightings:



SCAN ME

Android



SCAN ME

Apple



to register your willingness to verify sightings and become involved in **protecting our county** and surrounds.



SCAN ME

Cumbria Asian Hornet Team

For up to date local information



SCAN ME

