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AFB in Cumbria 2026 season

Yellow-legged Asian Hornet
Update, including a new CIC.

Future editions:
Over to you please.
Supporting our winter bees.

Welcome to the June edition of the Cumbria Bee Times. For me this edition marks a year since I edited my first CBT and once again the dog roses are in flower warning us of the 'June Gap'. The June 2026 BBKA news has a good article by Dr. Jane Medwell pointing out how we have to both be aware of honey bee starvation risk and take our local floral environment into account; here in Cumbria coincident poor weather forces the issue for us too. Keep a wary eye on your bees and make sure they are close to food stores, ideally with honey stores on brood frames. This is peak brood time so many of our bees are incubating brood and are unable to travel much distance to their honey stores when external temperatures are low. Like many readers I have just had a much needed joint replacement & am currently in the 'hip care phase' cautious of rotating, bending & lifting significant weights; what could possibly go wrong when bee keeping? So – beekeeping by proxy is the current method, possibly worse for the beekeeper than back seat driving. Check this and that, did you check the colonies for Varroa levels and when you get back could you do such and such for me? Fortunately Martin and I have managed bees together for many years now and for the last 15 years our Varroa management has been heavy on biotechnical control methods with minimal or no chemical use. Enforced 'rest time' allows me to write about using summer brood breaks to aid Varroa management, after all, that is what happens when our bees swarm. Lion optional! I hope the information is of use.

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

Dates for your diary:

CBKAA Honey Show
15th November 2026

Weekend 23-25th October
2026 Furrific Community
Event, St. Bees

March 2027

Kendal & SW BKA hosting
Maggie Gill talking about
the emerging pest,
Tropilaelaps.
Date to be fixed when
Maggie knows her
research programme.
Likely Sunday 14th March
2027.

cbteditor@gmail.com

Managing Varroa Mites: Using Biotechnical Methods, Including Summer Brood Interruption to Reduce Varroa Mite Infestation.



A plea for Cumbria's teaching apiaries to be practising these methods and showing us all how to build this into our routine beekeeping.

I make no apology for focusing on Varroa yet again, currently it is the greatest killer of honey bee colonies in the UK and will no doubt prove to be a significant player when the excessive colony losses over the 2025/2026 winter are analysed. Hobby beekeepers, including and maybe especially, new beekeepers with just a few hives cannot really afford to lose their bees. Previous CBTs and Cumbria wide education days have focused on Varroa monitoring, here at our 2 apiaries in south Cumbria we have used biotechnical controls for many years and on beekeeping courses we try to encourage minimising chemical use and if possible avoiding the use of *synthetic* chemicals to control mite populations. I find this a very challenging time to write or express views on Varroa management, there are definite Varroa management 'camps' out there. However, we all need to understand enough about Varroa lifecycles and how they affect our bees in order to raise those all-important, maximally healthy, 'winter bees' that will successfully take our colonies through winter into the late following spring.

First of all, why go to all the trouble of using biotechnical mite control? Surely it is far easier just to use proprietary chemical treatments. This can reflect personal beliefs – I would prefer to use chemicals on our cattle, our land and our bees as a last resort. I would also prefer to then use chemicals that the scientific literature suggests do the least collateral damage and have the lowest risk of inducing chemical resistance in their target species. Finally, when chemicals are needed we want them to work effectively. There is now a substantial body of research out there giving beekeepers up to date knowledge about Varroa and how it interacts with honey bees and both hobby and commercial beekeepers are using the information to reduce chemical inputs, we can follow their lead. We are also producing a luxury food that our customers expect to be harmless. For all those beekeepers striving to breed colonies of Varroa resistant bees all of the above apply too.

So, what next? We need to understand elements of the Varroa mite life cycle, its interaction with honey bees and its effects on them. Bear in mind that Varroa has coevolved with its host, the Asian honey bee for thousands of years – they can read each other like a book and play tricks on each other. Our Western honey bee is still on this journey; so are we but we already know how to 'cash in' on things that allow us to suppress the Varroa mite population.



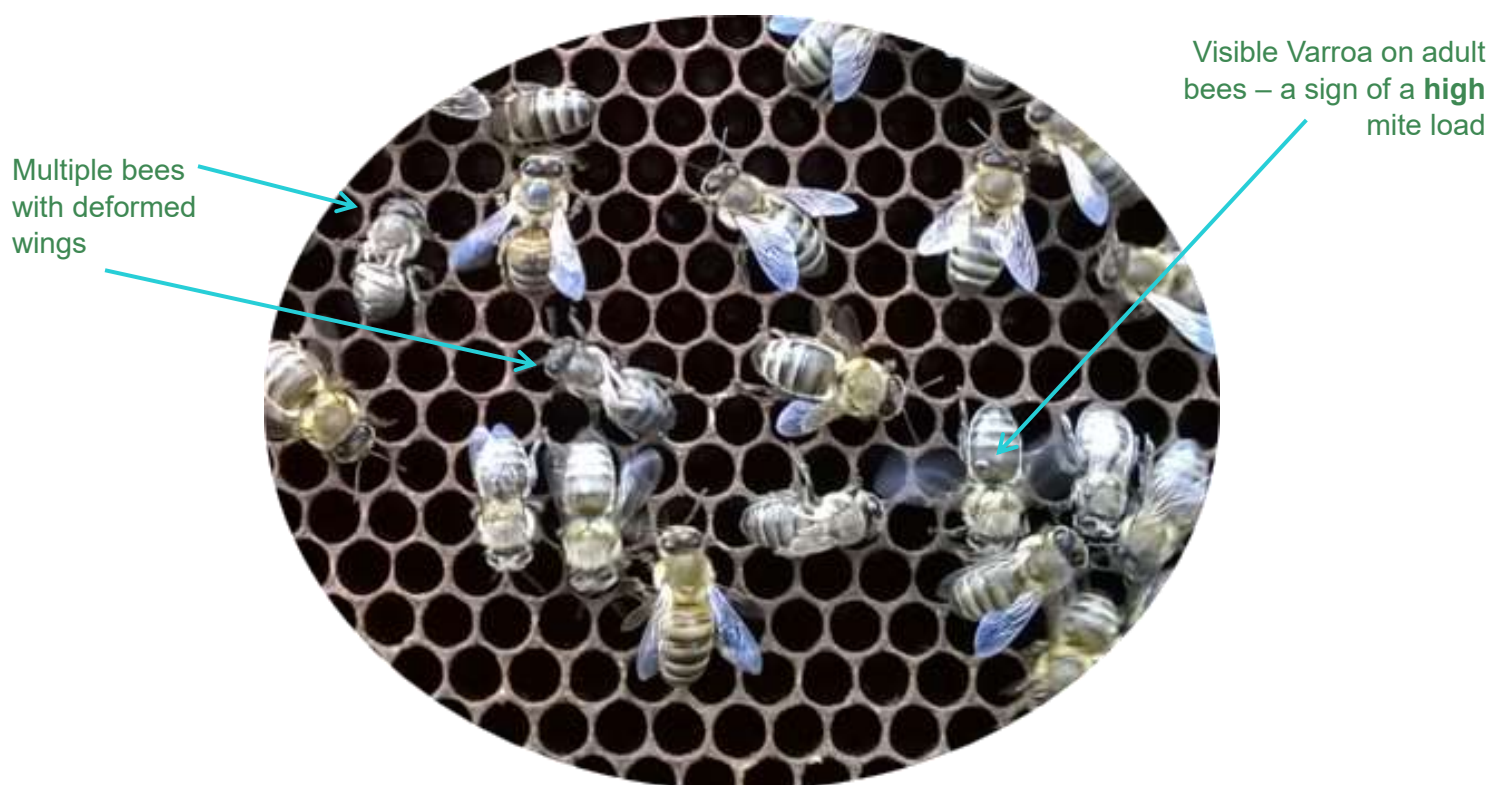
Reproductive phase in capped brood. *Photo JH.*

1. **The Varroa reproductive phase**, lasting 12 to 14 days, can only take place in capped brood cells. Therefore any gap in the presence of capped brood makes life tough for Varroa mite success. Conversely, prolonged spells with capped brood present in honey bee colonies allow Varroa mites to thrive and their numbers to increase exponentially. Usefully, Varroa mites prefer to enter drone brood cells, thought to be because the drone takes longer than a worker bee to develop allowing time for more Varroa mites to mature.
2. **The free living phase** on adult bees, lasting about 7 days and known (rather incorrectly) as the phoretic phase, is essential to the young female Varroa mite. This is the point when she matures fully and becomes fit to produce healthy eggs that will hatch into fit new mites when she returns into the brood cells to reproduce: from the Varroa mite's perspective this free living time is a risky phase for her; we can 'get at her' and maybe our bees have some opportunity to groom her from their bodies. During this phase it helps to know that Varroa mites prefer to parasitise a specific cohort of nurse bees where the mites are tucked away out of sight but they are vulnerable to chemical treatments.

The Free Living Phase – Out of sight, out of mind – this is where the Varroa mite hides.



3. Both of these phases damage our honey bees in many ways and, in addition, Varroa mites come carrying ever changing genetic lines of deformed wing virus with its own array of harmful weapons.
4. For our honey bee colonies to come through winter and the first part of spring in good health they and we need to minimise the multiple harms that Varroa mites inflict. Beekeepers need to concentrate on supporting their colonies to rear good 'winter bees', that special long-lived cohort that take a colony through the tough times of winter and early spring. An accumulation of the damage inflicted by Varroa can deceive us, all appears to be well and yet colonies can go on to collapse. This is because we cannot see all the harms being done and the increasing viral load and so we have to and must make the assumption that the only way forward is for us and our bees to **constantly** suppress Varroa mite numbers.



The Key to Success: Integrated Pest Management (IPM).

What does this mean? IPM is widely used in the horticultural and agricultural industries and is well established as a means of suppressing harmful pests. The pests are not eradicated and our honey bees will continue on a journey towards Varroa resistance while we support the rearing of fit winter bees and honey bee colonies using husbandry methods and carefully chosen chemicals when they are needed to reduce pest populations. This is arguably more suitable for new and hobby beekeepers with only a few colonies than the extreme tactic of allowing of Varroa susceptible colonies to just die out when the winter bees are not fit enough to make it through into later spring, losses can be very high; this method supports survival of the fittest but weak failing colonies make for inadequate guarding. Robbing by bees from stronger colonies transports Varroa mites, viruses and any other bee diseases and pests back to inflict damage on these hitherto fit strong colonies.

Integrated Pest Management needs to be:

1. Practised at every available opportunity not just once or maybe twice a year.
2. It is about pushing Varroa mite populations down using a variety of methods, so that the Varroa mites cannot fight back by becoming resistant to treatments and deplete our armoury.
3. It means monitoring of Varroa levels must be part of regular beekeeping.
4. Biotechnical controls can form a vital part of IPM and are easily understood once the Varroa life cycle is understood.
5. Chemicals can still be used when monitoring suggests that Varroa mites are getting too numerous. Knowledge is needed to decide which chemicals to use and it is always important to read the instructions! That is the only way to make sure treatments work.

Summer Brood Interruption.

Summer brood interruption can form a useful part of IPM aimed at pushing the Varroa mite population down below harmful levels. For beekeepers keen to minimise the use of chemicals in their hives it can form the mainstay of Varroa management so long as mite monitoring takes place to check, as well as possible, that all is going according to plan. **Very usefully, mite levels can be controlled during a nectar flow when using summer brood interruption, the same is not true of chemical controls when supers must be removed.**

In some years climate change is allowing a longer brood rearing season, on one hand this allows Varroa to breed more successfully, on the other hand it allows beekeepers to implement brood breaks whilst giving the bees enough time to rebuild the colony population. The many choices of brood interruption method all hammer down Varroa mite populations by removing the place that Varroa reproduces, the capped brood. They include:

1. Brood removal – for example - shook swarm, drone brood culling, artificial swarm
2. Queen caging – allowing capped brood to hatch without immediately being replaced. This is achieved by placing the queen in a small cage where workers can care for her but she has a break from egg laying. Caging the queen for 20 days reduces Varroa populations by about 40%.
3. Comb trapping – allowing the queen to lay on one comb at a time, the Varroa mites therefore only have one place to go to reproduce and each successive frame can be culled. It is worth remembering that, much as none of us like culling brood, sealed combs containing Varroa mites also unfortunately contain Varroa damaged bees that are not going to thrive.

How can our bees tolerate this type of management? Remarkably, so long as we know what we are doing, or more specifically, when we can get away with doing it without causing harm, our colonies thrive when we use these methods. Our bees age according to work load with its concomitant body tissue wear and tear – give them a break from brood rearing and they slow down ageing and then burst into action to bring the colony back into population strength. While having a break from brood rearing bees divert their efforts to bringing in nectar so appropriately timed brood breaks increase honey crops. Much freed from the harms of Varroa on brood and adult bees their efforts are all the more successful – we cannot properly see and therefore do not realise how much chronic harm Varroa and deformed wing virus are doing on a day to day basis. Our bees in fact create brood breaks themselves when colonies swarm, the old queen takes many young bees with her and about 25% of the Varroa load but the mites have nowhere to go to reproduce while the swarm finds a new home and then builds comb before the queen can recommence laying. The new queen left in the original colony has to develop, hatch, mature, mate and eventually commence laying while the remaining capped brood hatches releasing Varroa mites just when there is a brood break so once again the mites cannot reproduce. We all know how long we may have to wait for that chain of events to take place, it certainly does not suit the Varroa mite.

Please use the National Bee Unit's booklet 'Managing Varroa' to follow clear instructions on drone brood removal, comb trapping and artificial swarm.

Their fact sheets: <https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/resources-for-beekeepers/leaflets-guides-and-videos/fact-sheets>

And videos on shook swarming: <https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/resources-for-beekeepers/leaflets-guides-and-videos/training-videos>

<https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/diseases-and-pests/varroa>

If you feel this is a way you would like to take your beekeeping methods I recommend the short and very clearly laid out little book 'Summer Brood Interruption for Vital Honey Bee Colonies. Towards sustainable Varroa control using biotechnical methods'. Aleksander Uzunov, Martin Gabel, Ralph Buchler ISBN: 978-1-916612-00-6 It will probably be cheaper than one session of chemical treatments for your colonies.

Julia Hoggard. Ed.

American Foulbrood found in Cumbria 2026.

Lots of Cumbrian beekeepers will be aware that American Foulbrood (AFB) has been found in Cumbria this year. As Pam Gregory points out in her very readable book 'Healthy Bees are Happy Bees' published by BeeCraft 'AFB is a horrible disease to happen to bees and beekeepers, it is actually a relatively simple problem to get rid of'. This of course depends on beekeepers doing disease checks on their colonies, looking for abnormality and being aware that AFB is a notifiable brood disease – the law requires us to contact the National Bee Unit if we suspect our colonies are affected.

We should all check our colonies for disease and be 'disease aware' – that includes being very cautious about where we obtain bees and their combs from, where second hand hives come from and then keeping everything clean – biosecurity. AFB in particular is almost bomb proof, the bacteria form 'spores' that can survive for many decades in old comb and old beekeeping equipment. To find out what is happening in our area or anywhere you are buying bees and kit from go to the National Bee Unit's BeeBase website here:

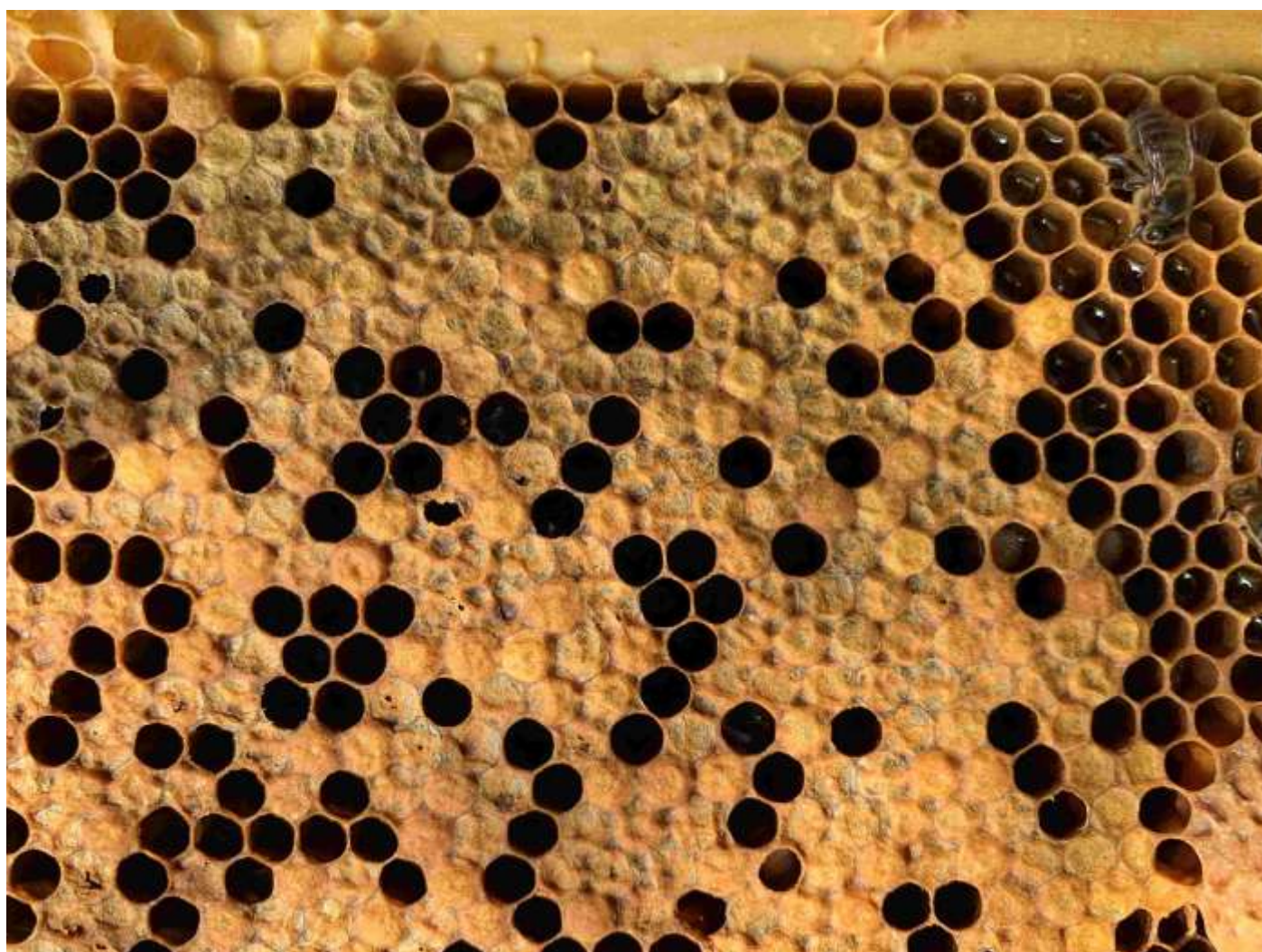
<https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/diseases-and-pests/reports-charts-and-maps/maps-2>



At first glance this map looks hopelessly blank but click on the legend symbol top right corner and then you can choose in this case 'Inspections with AFB by 10km Timeline' and scroll down to the bottom of the map and nudge the timeline handles along to 2026. You can then see the information we are looking for for this outbreak – it is restricted to 10km squares so that apiary and beekeeper details remain anonymous. Instructions for using the maps are at the bottom of the website page.

Samples from these colonies will have been sent to the FERA laboratory and disease strain typing will be carried out to try and trace links to the origin of these outbreaks. NBU inspectors will already have inspected other apiaries surrounding the outbreak and sadly but necessarily, the diseased colonies will have been destroyed. The destruction of infected colonies has a good chance of terminating the outbreak so long as all infected combs and bees have been identified to the NBU and standstill orders have been followed to the letter.

So – how to check for disease – it is essential to be thorough and clear the combs of bees so that both uncapped brood (where signs of European Foulbrood are likely to be visible) and capped brood can all be examined carefully and in a good light. AFB is a disease of capped brood; instead of even slabs of digestive biscuit coloured, dry, flat or slightly domed normal cappings brood may be pepper pot patterned with empty cells and young uncapped larvae dotted about. The cappings might appear sunken and greasy or wet looking and a sign that always needs investigating – the



AFB – 'Pepper pot cappings picked at, discoloured, sunken – always investigate cappings that the bees have picked at.
Photo Julia Hoggard.

bees may have picked at the capping making a small irregular hole into a cell after identifying an abnormality and investigating it. This is the reason for shaking the bees off the frames – we need to see all brood clearly, there might just be one picked at cell and this was apparently the case in this Cumbrian outbreak. The beekeeper then investigates by using a match stick or tweezers to widen out that opening and investigating what is inside: AFB causes a ropery goo to develop that, when stirred with the match stick, can be stretched upwards. The beekeeper places their apiary

under a 'voluntary standstill' and removes nothing from the apiary until the NBU inspector has been informed and followed up the beekeeper's concerns. The beekeeper should not risk transmitting infection to other colonies in the apiary on tools, gloves or smoker bellows – remember how much we washed our hands and isolated when COVID 19 arrived. Nor should the beekeeper destroy the affected colony, the NBU inspector will attend, send samples to the FERA lab and assist with management of the outbreak.

Watch here to learn how to do a disease check:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kj8NHSIVTCw>

and look at images here:

https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/assets/PDFs/3_Resources_for_beekeepers/Best_practice_guidelines/BPG_4_Disease_recognition_with_healthy_comb_v8_Layout_1.pdf

<https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/diseases-and-pests/foulbroods-notifiable>

https://www.nationalbeeunit.com/assets/PDFs/3_Resources_for_beekeepers/Advisory_leaflets/Foulbrood_2017_Web_version.pdf

Ask a mentor or other local beekeeper to show you how to do a disease check and explain what 'normal' looks like. Teach yourself what 'normal' looks like by shaking bees off frames in your own apiary and studying what you can see. Most of us will never see these foulbrood diseases so there is no shame in asking for help to understand normality. For abnormal, especially if you suspect foulbrood the NBU inspectors will always be prepared to help you – first of all a good, focused photograph helps the inspector enormously.

Julia Hoggard Ed.

Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet – Cumbria Updates June 2026.

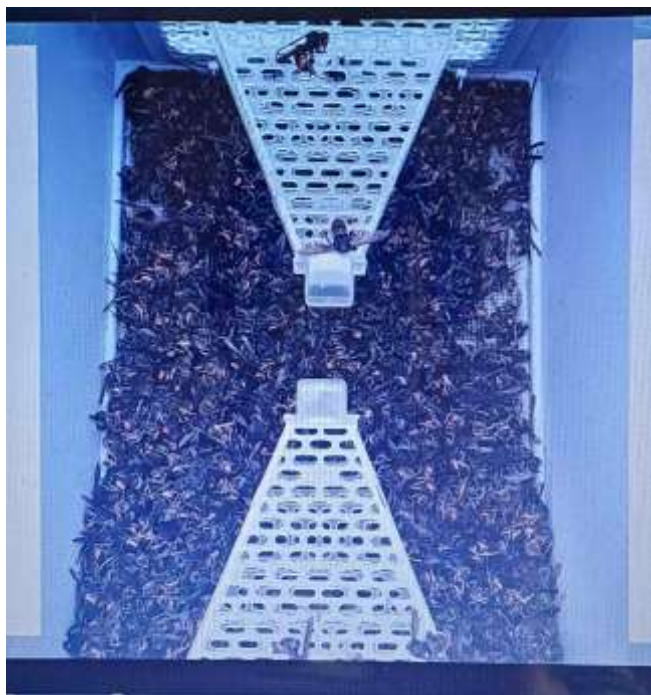
- So far this year, 29 sightings in UK
- Furthest north spotted at Doncaster on 26 February

We've had a relatively mild, albeit wet, winter followed by a wet spring. Welcome to Cumbria! We might get the hat trick of a wet summer, but I suspect we may get a few weeks of beautiful sunshine, as we did in May. Why does this matter?

I joined the BBKA zoom talk by Richard Noel on 4 June. He is a commercial beekeeper in Brittany, northern France. He shared his experience of a mild winter followed by very hot weather at end June/start July in 2022. As a result of the mild winter, all the hibernating YLAH queens survived and became foundresses. Beekeepers were so busy raising queens and taking honey that they failed to spot the silent growth of the embryonic YLAH nests.

The beekeepers were very much caught off-guard when plagues of Asian hornets attacked their apiaries. Beekeepers noticed that those bees who had ventured out to forage were not returning.

Very quickly the bees aged 18+ days old were absent from the colonies. With no supplies coming in, the queens stopped laying, so there was reduced possibility of winter bees being laid. Additionally, the Asian Hornets would hawk outside the hives or fly under the hives causing stress to the bees inside who would not then go out to forage. The beekeepers set up traps, which required emptying every couple of days. Traps filled up so quickly that the Asian Hornets did not drown in the attractant but were able to walk out over the heaps of dead Asian Hornets.



Images showed thousands of dead Asian Hornets in overflowing traps.

Here in the UK, thankfully we are not at the stage where we have plagues of Asian hornets. And to keep it that way, we need to remain vigilant to the threat of Asian Hornets hitching a lift across the North Sea. An average YLAH nest consumes approximately 11 kg (24lb) of insect prey in a season. They are not fussy eaters and will take any pollinators to make a meatball of the thorax which is fed to the young larvae.

Please learn to recognise the appearance of the YLAH; yellow legs, orange face, completely black thorax, black abdomen with a distinctive orange band.

Spring-trapping can eliminate foundress queens before they establish their nest. An effective attractant is a mix of beer, white wine and real blackcurrant fruit juice e.g. Ribena. Meanwhile, work continues to improve technologies to trace and destroy the YLAH nests e.g. using radio transmitters attached to the YLAH body which can track it back to the nest. Development of items such as the Buzz copper are ongoing, this uses AI technology to photograph and identify whether it is an YLAH visiting a bait station.

We can still eradicate this invasive species, but we must not be complacent.



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

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

Insect Alert Systems CIC – a new way forward, planning for the future with the invasive Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet.

At the late stages of last year, as a result of the call by area volunteer YLAH coordinators, a small cadre of area coordinators, hosted by the BBKA chair, met to discuss the standardisation of volunteer management and the centralisation of volunteer resources. It was perceived that either a charity or a community benefit organisation would need to be formed to handle the finances and distribute resources. There was an important secondary function to such an organisation, in that there would come a time, when the DEFRA commitment would reduce and the need for action would not. This organisation could act as a go between, functioning in coordination with the government, sharing information and policy as well as serving the volunteer body for the future management of the threat.

Some of the individuals involved already had significant experience with government interaction at high levels and others had previous experience in setting up and running companies. As a result a non-profit community interest company (CIC) was formed on the 1st June 2026, it is called Insect Alert Systems CIC. Its remit was expanded as a result of meetings and consultations with similar research, government and volunteer bodies in other countries (such as The Netherlands, New Zealand and Ireland). The expansion of remit covers not just the UK's YLAH situation but similar situations in those and other countries. As the name suggests the projection, as bought up in the first meeting's discussions, also predicted that the YLAH may not be the only insect we might be called upon to manage. Significantly one of the co-founders of the company is Jonathan Semple, the designer of the BuzzCopper, and as such its production and distribution will be managed by IAS CIC.

At present this is all still in embryonic stages, however, things are moving rapidly and it is to our Cumbrian benefit that Andrew Brown, one of our county coordinators is in close consultation with the main driving personnel in this development and will keep us updated as we continue to develop our volunteer response to Cumbria's response to this threat.

Insect Alert Systems CIC (creators of the BuzzCopper system) is a UK-based Community Interest Company established to protect honey bees and native pollinators. They develop and supply automated, camera-equipped traps (the "BuzzCopper") that use on-device AI to detect and alert beekeepers to the presence of predatory species such as the YLAH in real-time. [1, 2, 3, 4, 5]

The primary purposes of the CIC focus entirely on honey bee and pollinator protection:

- **Invasive Species Tracking:** Detecting predators such as Asian hornets before they can establish nests or decimate local apiaries. [1, 2, 3, 4]
- **Automated Alerts:** Using AI to classify targeted species—distinguishing hornets from native European hornets and wasps—and sending real-time notifications via email or app to beekeepers. [1, 2, 3]
- **Community-Focused Protection:** Operating as a CIC ensures that any surplus funding generated is reinvested entirely into protecting pollinators rather than being distributed to shareholders. [1]

References link into the BuzzCopper website <https://www.buzzcopper.org/>

Andrew Brown, County Coordinator

Cumbria Bee Times – Over To Cumbrian Beekeepers.

The next edition of the CBT will be due in September 2026.

Next Edition No. 32 - September 2026. Copy deadline end of August 2026



Including - Preparing to support our colonies through another wet Cumbrian Winter

AND PLEASE START PREPARING TO SUPPORT THE CBKAA HONEY SHOW

Preparing for the Cumbria Beekeepers Area Association (CBKAA) Honey Show

The annual CBKAA Honey Show will be taking place at the Evergreen Community Hall in Penrith on Sunday 15th November. We hope that beekeepers from across Cumbria and beyond will join us for a day of interesting talks and activities and the opportunity to enter their honey and other bee products into the Honey Show itself.

The CBKAA Honey Show Schedule was expanded last year to include sections which may be of interest to non-beekeepers such as entering a photograph or baking honey flavoured cakes & biscuits so there should be 'something for everyone!'.

So take a look at the Honey Show Schedule and over the summer start to plan what you might enter for the show in November. Tips for 'Preparing for the Honey Show' can be found on a short video on the CBKAA web site: www.cumbriabeekeepers.co.uk

Planning in progress: The CBKAA working group who are developing the Honey Show Programme of talks and presentation welcome suggestions from members as to what should be included. Please contact Margaret mr4cnr@gmail.com with your ideas by the end of June.

YOUR SHOW SCHEDULE ACCOMPANIES THIS EDITION OF CBT.



Respond to this CBT with feedback & send copy to cbteditor@gmail.com