



Granulated ivy honey – difficult for bees

In this issue:

Editor's Note: Ivy – the last significant forage of the year.

Main Themes:

BBKA assessments and modules, developing our skills.

Yellow-legged Asian Hornet Update.

Future editions:

December 2026 Winter days out and spotting Bee Boles



Welcome to the September edition of the CBT. I think most of us have probably rather enjoyed a 'proper summer', without the extreme heat and drought that other parts of the British Isles have tolerated. In south Cumbria the rainfall arrived just in time to ensure an exceptional bramble nectar flow but some of our colonies had a challenging spring; initial hot weather bringing on the swarm urge so colonies split themselves or beekeepers controlled events but the later May bad weather lead to poor queen mating and subsequent drone laying queens for some colonies. Anyway, we are now well into winter preparations and the bees are bringing in ivy pollen and nectar. Ivy flowers produce nectar with an exceptionally high glucose content so the nectar granulates rapidly, the flower nectar is very accessible to lots of insects especially flies with their moppy tongues and the nectar even granulates on the flower. In honey bee colonies the granulated honey can be problematic, setting so solidly that bees cannot access the sugars and the colony may starve. It helps to feed syrup or candy simultaneously resulting in a mixed economy of stores.

Dates for your diary:

Cumbria Honey Show
Saturday 1st November
2025 Bothel Village Hall
Details at the end of the newsletter



National Honey Day
October 21st 2026

<https://www.bbka.org.uk/news/national-honey-day>



Granulated ivy nectar

Beekeeping – the Longer You Care For Your bees the More There is to Learn.

The challenge of our lovely county is the block of mountains in the middle, they make for glorious journeys to meet other beekeepers but get in the way of easy travel to conferences and meetings especially as we all become more conscious of our carbon footprint, the cost of energy or on dark winter evenings.

The National Bee Unit's Healthy Bee Plan 2030 focuses on 4 key outcomes for us all to aspire to:

1. Effective biosecurity and good husbandry
2. Enhanced skills and capacity
3. Sound science and evidence
4. Knowledge exchange and collaboration

A year ago CBT focused on beekeepers as teachers so the successes of Cumbrian beekeepers who have taken BBKA modules and assessments in the intervening year give us the perfect excuse to focus on points 2 and 4 above and look at 'enhanced skills' and 'knowledge exchange'.

The BBKA assessment flowchart can be found [here](#)

Kendal Beekeepers start preparing for the assessments immediately after New Year during those dark winter evenings and are invited to join in the sessions irrespective of whether they want to have a go at the assessments or modules – it really is ok to join in in order to enjoy learning without any pressure to 'take exams'. Adults learn best differently from children:-

Knowles' 4 Principles Of Andragogy

- Adults need to be involved in the planning and evaluation of their instruction.
- Experience (including mistakes) provides the basis for the learning activities.
- Adults are most interested in learning subjects that have immediate relevance and impact to their job or personal life.
- Adult learning is problem-centred rather than content-oriented.

So, we circulate the assessment details and then as a group decide how to proceed – options involve gathering together at someone's home, peer group studying, using Zoom and saving some or lots of the syllabus content for apiary sessions once the weather warms up. Our 2026 group opted for meetings in homes during winter and then a move to apiary meetings as soon as the weather warmed up. Our sessions are backed up with PowerPoints referencing the syllabus numbering and consisting almost entirely of photographs, these are made available just for reference or revision via Google Drive, we do not plod through PowerPoints! Over the years we have been joined by members of other local BKAs and have supported other BKAs as they study.

Several of Cumbria's beekeepers have taken the BBKA assessments and modules this year and have written of their experiences.

The Basic Assessment

Having not done any form of test or assessment for more than 30 years, I have to confess that my first glance at the BBKA Basic Assessment was a little daunting. However, as you start to work through the syllabus, you soon realise that this is not an assessment for assessment's sake. Rather, it is designed to help you gain the practical experience and knowledge needed to become a good beekeeper.

Whether you ultimately go on to take the assessment itself or not, the knowledge gained through studying the syllabus can hugely improve your understanding of your bees.

I now know not only how to light a smoker and keep it alight, but also why we use it and how to use it effectively. Learning how to assess a healthy brood pattern and spot signs of disease is another particularly useful part of the syllabus. Vigilance against both American and European foulbrood is becoming ever more important, especially as we see disease occurring much closer to home. But even recognising more common conditions such as sacbrood and chalkbrood, and understanding why they occur, is valuable knowledge for the novice beekeeper.

Swarming, which certainly instilled fear in me as a new beekeeper, is also covered in the beginners' course. Understanding why swarming occurs and learning the basic methods of swarm control makes the whole subject seem much less daunting. Similarly, recognising the signs of a queenless colony, learning how to test whether a queen is present, and understanding how to unite colonies are all useful practical skills covered by the course.

As we move into autumn, my improved understanding of Varroa has also helped me unscramble the vast array of varroacides available. I now have a much better understanding of how to choose the most appropriate treatment and, importantly, when it should be used, helping to ensure that my bees remain healthy and thrive through the winter.

Of course, it is possible to learn beekeeping entirely through experience, watching YouTube videos, making mistakes as you go along and learning from them but the Basic Assessment syllabus gives you a huge head start. It provides a framework for understanding much better what your bees need to remain healthy and productive and, ultimately, to help you achieve a good honey crop.

I would recommend it to anyone starting out in beekeeping — whether or not they decide to take the assessment.

Sue Paterson, Kendal & South Westmorland BKA



Kendal & SW BKA study group – group home studying – with tea and scones.

Honeybee Heath Practical Assessment

Having just taken the assessment this summer, I really encourage beekeepers to think about doing this. It is a practical assessment that lasts about 90 minutes held in a local but unfamiliar apiary. There are just the candidate and one BBKA assessor for the session - so candidates have plenty of time and space. It involves looking through a hive or two and discussing what can be seen, such as sacbrood or DWV (deformed wing virus). There is time to talk about methods of monitoring, reducing and treating Varroa, the role of the National Bee Unit and notifiable pests and diseases. Part of the exam involves demonstrating ways to improve hive health through comb changing - I was asked to show how to use equipment for a shook swarm. The Assessor was great very friendly and the assessment was also really informative.

You will need your Basic Beekeeping award to register with the BBKA, and loads more fun if 2 or 3 folk can prepare together. I was lucky enough to be part of study group for this, although I had to wait a year to get the Basic Beekeeping completed. The exam costs £25, but CBKAA reimburse successful candidates in recognition of the importance honeybee health for sustainable beekeeping.

A few beekeepers across Cumbria have now completed the Bee Health Assessment, and any of us are happy to talk about the process. If you are interested for 2027 but don't know anyone else who is, please let your Association or CBKAA know as there are hopefully other beekeepers you can make contact with.

Pat Norris Penrith BKA

Studying Over Winter – BBKA Modules.

Hey, want to learn more about beekeeping over the winter? It could help you spot the signs that your colony is about to swarm or that they may need some intervention to keep them healthy.

Have you considered studying a British Beekeepers' Association (BBKA) module? There are currently seven modules available including Honeybee Behaviour (like foraging and swarming), Honeybee Biology (do bees have knees?) and Breeding of Honeybees (to promote good-tempered bees). Plus, there are now two supplementary modules: one about Plants & Pollinators and a new one called History of Beekeeping. The syllabus for each module is available on the BBKA membership hub [here](#). There's no obligation to actually sit the examinations although the exams give you a target to focus on and recognition that you've reached a certain standard.

You may find that others in your Beekeeping Association would like to have a go, but don't want to study alone. Good news, as you don't have to study alone! I've completed a few modules now and it has been fun to get together with beekeepers from other Cumbrian Beekeeper Associations. In our current study group, there are members from Carlisle, Cockermouth, Keswick and Penrith. Most of us meet in person but one joins via Teams. If you join a study group via BBKA, you may be "remote learning" with beekeepers from anywhere in the UK. By sharing beekeeping anecdotes and experiences you can deepen your knowledge of the black art that is the beekeeper's craft.

In our study group, we have attempted the practice questions posed in the modules, then pooled answers for a more complete response. We're now going through past papers in preparation for the examination in mid-November.

If the thought of a written examination puts you off and you prefer hands-on practical beekeeping, then it is very useful to look at the Basic Beekeeping assessment which is the gateway to all the

other modules and practical assessments. If you're interested in recognising symptoms of diseases, then how about the Honeybee Health Certificate? No written tests and one-to-one coaching from a Master Beekeeper.

Even though bees don't read the beekeeping books, it is fascinating to find out more about our honey-producing fuzzy friends! 😊

Clare Woowat Cockermouth BKA Vice-President

STOP PRESS

Cumbria Beekeepers Area Association has bought the essential books on the BBKA modules reading list to be held by Cumberland & Westmorland & Furness libraries for all of us to access.

Just order into your local library.

(We hope the libraries will have these processed & available by November).

Knowledge Exchange - Meetings Open to Beekeepers Across the County.

The Cumbrian Autumn Conference at Embleton takes place each year; this September was a really useful day, we all learned new things and it was, as always, an opportunity to meet up and socialise. Car sharing was great too, time to chat for a while.

The Cumbria BKA Area Honey Show takes place later in the autumn in November, for finding details of this year's show see the end of the CBT.

In March 2027 Maggie Gill will come to Kendal to talk to us about *Tropilaelaps* – her travel for research schedule can move around a bit but put Sunday March 14th 2027 in your diary 📅

A New Microscopy Group in South Cumbria – New Things to Discover.

Kendal and South Westmorland beekeepers are hoping to set up a microscopy group. We are fortunate in that we have a few beekeepers with expertise in pollen identification as well as parasite recognition.

Although we may need to purchase some equipment such as a centrifuge we do have microscopes that will enable us to do dissection and microscopy. Our aim is to have a first exploratory meeting on October 13th which will be held near Kendal at the Cumbria Wildlife Trust Head Office, Crook Road, Kendal LA8 8LX starting at 7.30 to gauge interest and chat about what sort of activities the group would be interested in pursuing.

Potentially we could look at bee anatomy, screen weak colonies for the presence of *Vairimorpha* (Nosema) or *Acarine*, and look at the types of pollen our bees are bringing in throughout the year, we may even get some speakers in?



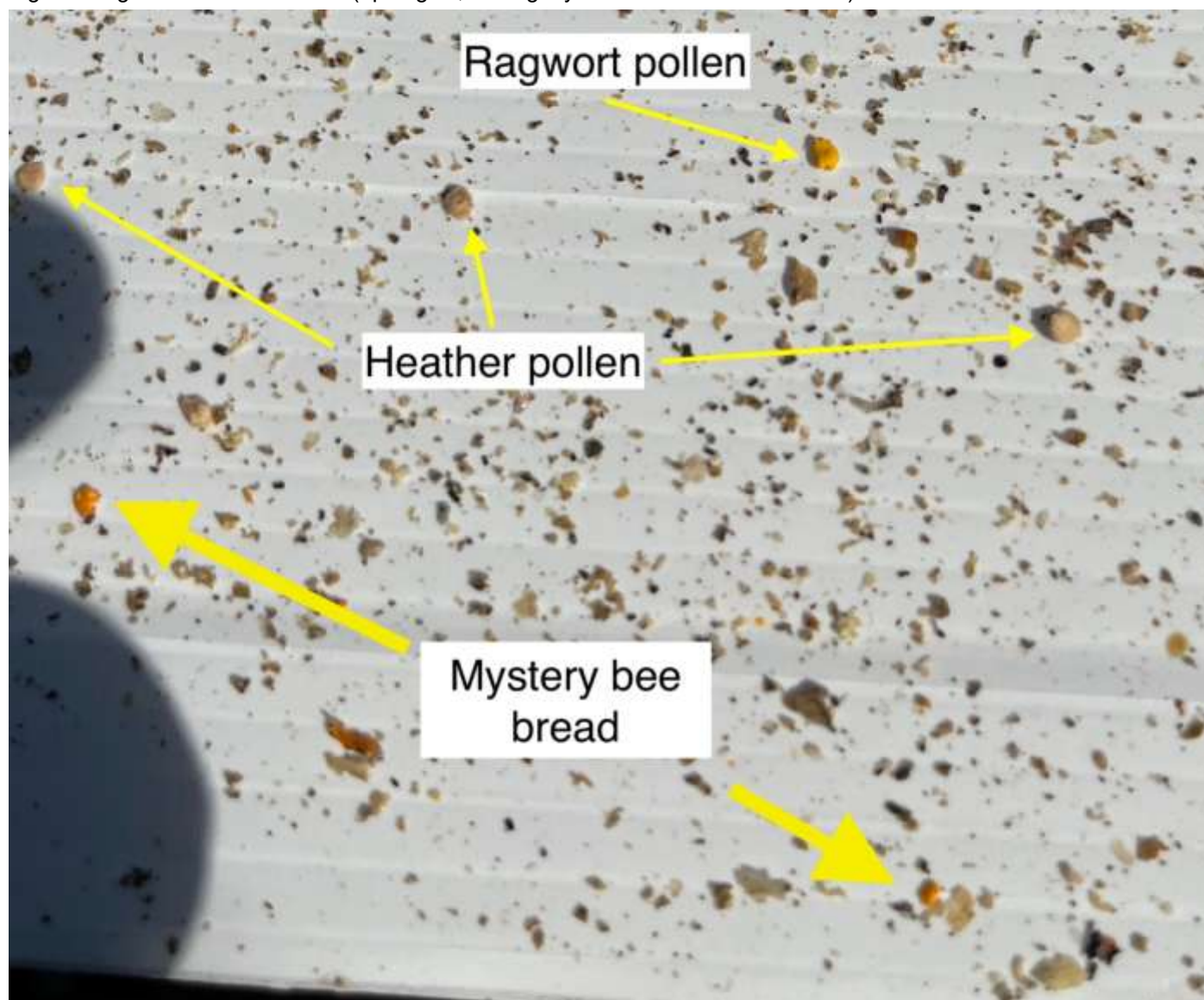
Vairimorpha (Nosema) spores – iPhone via Microscope Ed. JH

This is not aimed at people with specialised knowledge who are accomplished at microscopy (although they would also be welcome) but open to anyone who is interested in delving a little bit deeper. If you are interested **please contact Sue Paterson spatersonvetmb1959@btinternet.com or text or WhatsApp 07766553675** and/or come along on the night. If anyone has experience of running microscopy groups please get in touch with Sue.

Blackberry Rust Spores

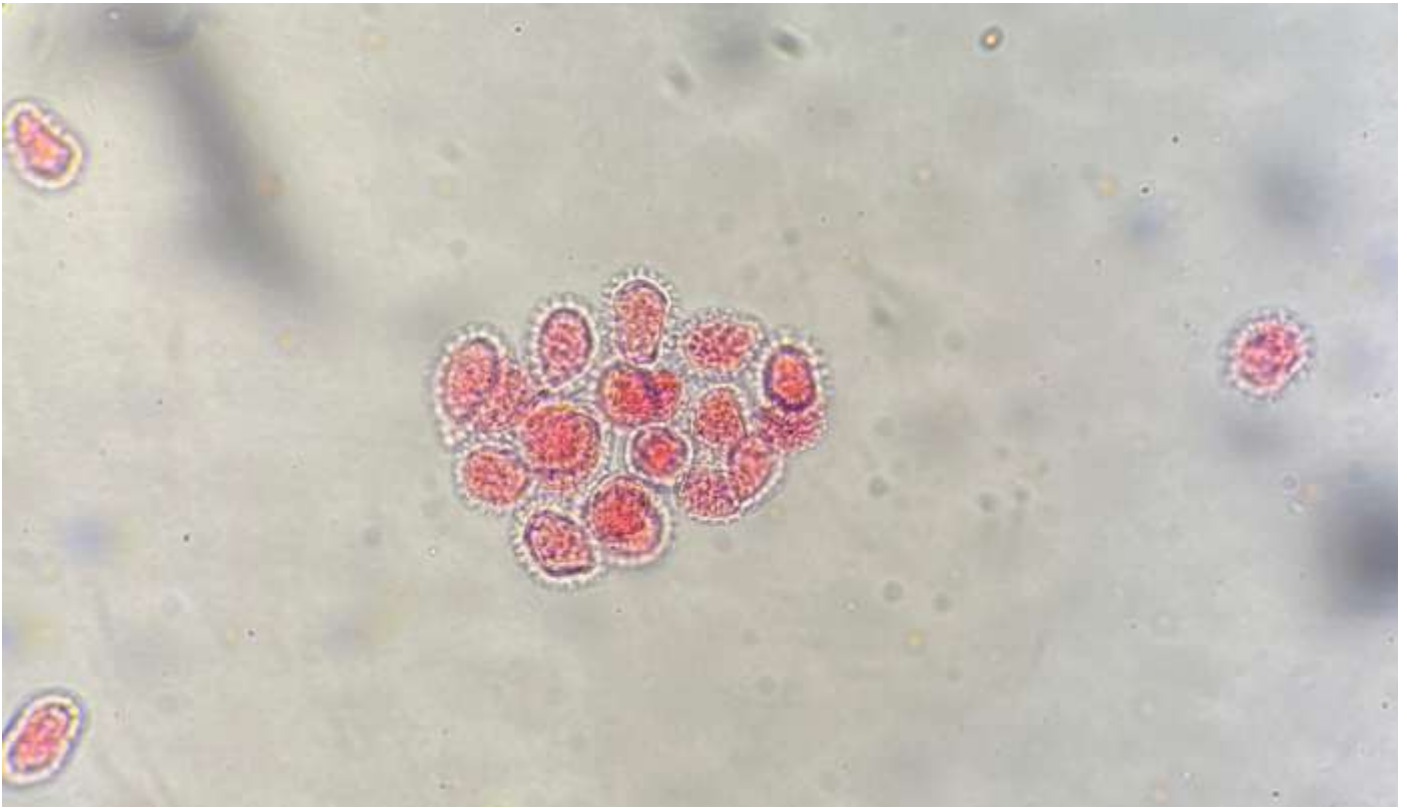
During August and into September I have had one colony whose bees kept appearing at the hive door with their pollen sacs filled with something that was bright orange. Then, a calm sunny day would arrive and they would go back to the heather, returning with pollen sacs laden with beige-coloured loads. Then, the weather would turn again and the bright orange pollen sacs would return.

Fig. 1: Image of the Varroa board (apologies, it's slightly out of focus at the bottom!)



When I took the Varroa board out from this hive in August, there was some of this orange “pollen” on there. Looking at it under the microscope it turned out not to be pollen grains at all, but spores. The irregular shaped spores were distinctive, but not anything I’d come across before.

Fig. 2: The orange bee bread under the microscope. The pink colour comes from a stain to help see the spores.



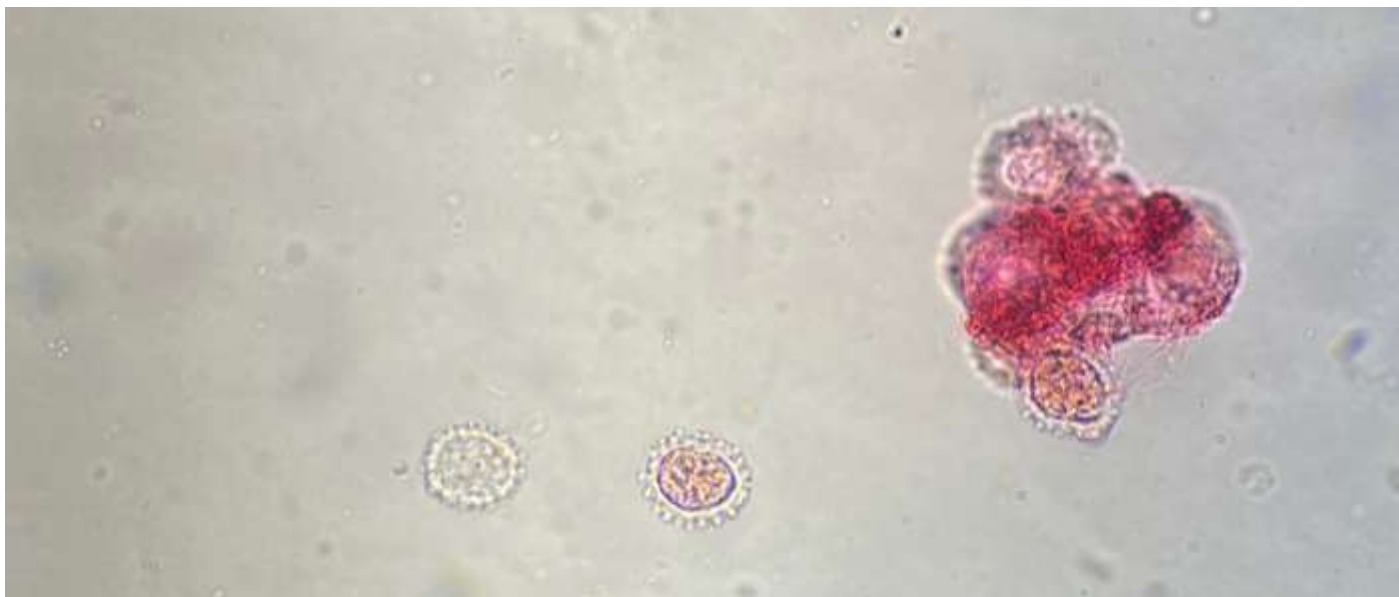
The fungal spores were from the rust *Phragmidium violaceum* found on blackberry leaves. A quick trip to my hives did in fact reveal that the blackberry bushes in front of the hives did have this rust. Interestingly, the orange spore stage of this fungus is usually present in spring, but I was noticing them on young leaves.

Fig 3: a) top of the leaf showing the reddish/purple spot and b) showing the underneath of the leaf with the orange spores. Note the leaf is a young leaf in that it is a lot lighter in colour compared with the leaves around it.



And the image below shows what the orange spores look like under the microscope:

Fig. 4: Spores found on the blackberry leaf from the *Phragmidium violaceum* fungus.



Honey bees collecting these spores is not an unknown phenomenon. Indeed, in 1901 in Austin, Texas, W.H. Lang, an entomologist observed honey bees visiting blackberry leaves and collecting orange spores. At this point though “The chemical composition of these spores which makes it possible for the bees to use them in the place of pollen, is as yet an undetermined quantity” (1).

More recent research on the nutritional value of spores to honey bees is ambiguous as to whether this is a “starvation” food of bees, or not. Randy Oliver (2) seems to have found them associated with colonies that have perished. However, research published this year on rust spores from myrtle entering hives in Australia has shown that spores remain a viable food source in the hive for up to nine days (so therefore could be used for feeding) and also that they match or exceed the nutritional quality of known high-protein pollens (3).

Whilst this research has been conducted on a different type of fungal spores, it shows we shouldn't assume that the spores are necessarily bad for the colony. The true value of the rust spores for Cumbrian bees is likely to lie somewhere in the middle of this. Certainly, my bees seem to be bringing it in when other forage isn't available to them.



Fig. 5 Bee entering the hive with orange spores

Also, interestingly, of my three colonies (all equidistant to the blackberries) only one colony has

been bringing in the orange spores in a great number - the one with the darker bees. So is this also evidence of the native bees being more adaptable to their environment?

Dr. Suzi Richer

Member of Kendal and South Westmorland Beekeepers Association, Palynologist and Medical Herbalist

References

1. Lang WH. Fungus spores as bee-bread. *The Plant World*. 1901;4(3):49-51.
2. Oliver R. "Fried Eggs" Identified! Scientific Beekeeping. January 15, 2013. Accessed September 11, 2026. <https://scientificbeekeeping.com/fried-eggs-identified/>
3. Honey bees as potential vectors of the invasive rust pathogen *Austropuccinia psidii*: nutritional mutualism and implications for pathogen spread. *NeoBiota*. 2026;106:75-90. doi:10.3897/neobiota.106.169027

Update Yellow-legged Asian Hornet September 2026



To Autumn: Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness

In other words, ripe apples which become tasty windfall treats for wasps and could also attract the Yellow-legged Asian Hornet, YLH. By the time you read this in Cumbria Bee Times, the YLH awareness week (7-13 September) will be over, but that is no reason for us to be complacent. On 9 September, a Penrith angler, near the confluence of the River Eden with Crowdungal Beck, was hospitalised following multiple stings. On investigation, this turned out to be a European Hornet nest but a reminder to us of the hazards posed by these very defensive insects.

Here's an update on sightings so far this year compared with last and a reminder about baits to use in monitoring stations.

Autumn Statistics

- Last year, by 30 October **2025**, the Animal & Plant Health Agency's National Bee Unit (NBU) had received 530 credible sightings of YLHs and 157 confirmed nests.
- So far this year, up to 10 September **2026**, there have been 187 sightings in the UK and 60 nests found.
- Furthest north spotted at Doncaster on 26 February 2026
- Secondary nest found in Oldham, Greater Manchester, mid-August 2026



Crown Copyright APHA

What to use as bait and when.

Note, if in doubt, the YLH will visit a sweet, carbohydrate-rich bait at any time of the year!

When	Who	What
Early Spring onwards	Emerging Queen	sweet, carbohydrate-rich source, as she needs energy e.g. sugar plus dark beer or fruit juice
July- November	Foraging Workers	Protein source to feed larvae e.g. mashed raw meat or fish diluted to 25% with water. Change after 3 days.
Autumn	Adult YLAHs	Sweet source e.g. ripe fruit, windfall apples
Summer & autumn	Your bee colonies are bait stations, YLAH food cafes, Spend 15+ minutes watching your hive entrances for hawking hornets and check your bees are behaving normally at the entrance, not huddled & scared to fly.	

Remember, we have prepared 10 monitoring traps for each Cumbrian Beekeeping Association and these have been distributed to the Asian Hornet Coordinators for each branch so that they are available for deploying should the Asian Hornet be suspected in Cumbria.

BuzzCopper Update

There will be a demonstration on building BuzzCopper YLH Monitoring Stations at this year's CBKAA Honey Show, at Evergreen Community Hall, Penrith, CA11 7LH on 15 November 2026. Matt Truscott from the BuzzCopper team will deliver the demonstration and lead a practical construction session. For those who have not read about BuzzCopper, it is an Asian Hornet detector which uses an AI-camera to monitor a bait station and determine whether the visiting insect is an Asian Hornet. If it is, an alert will be emailed over Wi-Fi to your mobile phone. The idea is to use these relatively cheap devices (£25-£30) to monitor remotely.

The production and distribution of Buzz Copper will be managed by Insect Alert Systems Community Interest Company, IAS CIC.

Actions each beekeeper can take

Read the letter from the Chair in September's BBKA news, pg4, which will also direct you to resources on the BBKA member hub.

Download the Asian Hornet Watch App to your mobile phone.

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

Could you tell the difference between our native European Hornet and the non-native Yellow-legged Asian Hornet [*Vespa velutina*]? (There are images of both on the Asian Hornet Watch App plus other suspects).

UK Coordinated Response

A non-profit community interest company (CIC) was formed on the 1 June this year, called Insect Alert Systems CIC. Its remit was expanded following consultations with various bodies in other countries, including The Netherlands, New Zealand and Ireland. IAS CIC will address the UK's YLH situation and will be positioned to manage other non-native insect species. One of the co-founders of the company is the designer of the Buzzcopper mentioned above, Jonathan Semple.

Why should we bother?

An average AH 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. Obviously, our beehive colonies are a convenient fast-food outlet!

We can still eradicate this invasive species, but we must remain vigilant.

Meanwhile, work continues to improve technologies to trace and destroy the AH nests e.g. using radio transmitters attached to the AH body which can track it back to the nest and Buzz Copper remote monitors as mentioned above.

REMEMBER:

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



Visit www.kendalbeekeepers.com/caht and we have a WhatsApp group which receives regular updates from BBKA on the UK 's evolving YLH position.

Acronyms

APHA = Animal & Plant Health Agency

BBKA = British Beekeepers' Association

BKA = Beekeepers' Association

CBKAA = Cumbria Beekeepers' Area Association

IAS CIC = Insect Alert Systems Community Interest Company

NBU = National Bee Unit

YLH or YLAH = Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet



"Courtesy The Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) Julia Hoggard, Crown Copyright"

Clare Woowat Asian Hornet County Coordinator for CBKAA

Vice-President, Cockermouth BKA

Cumbria Bee Times – Over To Cumbrian Beekeepers.

Edition No. 33 - December 2026.

A huge thanks to all contributors to this CBT. Please send me items for December.

Main Theme: Christmas and winter trips out – spotting bee houses, bee shelters and bee boles. I will have a go at this one but please send me any info you have including pictures of bee structures near you. JH

May I have some honey show reports please? Deadline end November 2026
cbteditor@gmail.com

Date for your Diary – 2026 Cumbria Honey Show Sunday November 15th 2026

BOOK YOUR TICKETS [here](#)

<https://www.ticketsource.com/cumbria-beekeepers-area-association>



HONEY SHOW PROGRAMME

& DOWNLOAD A SCHEDULE [here](#)

<https://cumbriabeekeepers.org/calendar/the-honey-show-for-everyone/>



**DON'T MISS THE
BUZZCOPPER
DEMO !!**