



Farnham Beekeepers

A Division of Surrey Beekeepers

Chair's Report for 2025

2025 was a good year for FBKA: the weather was good, the bees thrived, lots of members attended apiary meetings, we had an excellent honey crop, and some of our members won prizes at the National Honey Show! Our financial position remains healthy, and the number of members remains stable.

I have kept the theme of this year's report the same as last year's as I thought it would be good to remind ourselves again of the objectives we have as a charity and to reflect on how well we have done against them. Our primary objectives are:

- to promote and further the craft of beekeeping and the science of bees and their pathogens, to the public good;
- to advance the education of the public in the environmental and economic importance of bees.

The first objective is covered by the first few sections below and the second by the section on Events and Public Activities.

Winter Talks

Over the winter we had, as usual, a series of excellent talks and workshops organised by Jacqui Sellers.

The first was in January when we had a very entertaining talk on Heather Honey given by two of our members: Elizabeth Knight and Olly Chadwick. Elizabeth described the different sorts of heather honey and their properties, and Olly explained, in his own inimitable style, some of the difficulties involved in the extraction process.

At the beginning of March there was a very successful Skep-Making workshop, held at the Rural Life Living Museum.

Later in March, one of our members, Brad Davis, gave a talk on Honey Show Secrets. Brad has had a lot of success at honey shows and he is currently training to be a show judge, so it was great to see him passing on some of his knowledge.

Thanks are due to Jacqui Sellers for organising the talks.

Apiary

All twelve colonies at the apiary survived the winter and most built up strongly during the spring. After splitting as part of swarm control, we had more than enough to support all our teaching



activities. In fact, at one point we had 23 colonies. The split colonies continued to thrive over the summer and even with our priority being teaching as opposed to honey production, by the end of summer we had over 170 kg of honey, the best yield we have ever had!

Regular Saturday meetings started at the beginning of April and continued over the spring and summer. As in previous years, they provided training for beginners and less-experienced members, and they also provided topics intended to be of interest to the more experienced. They were generally well attended, and nearly 40 people attended one week. As always, they are a place to meet and discuss all things beekeeping.

This season we increased the number of different hive types and as well as our standard Nationals we now have a Flow Hive on Langstroth frames, a Commercial, a 14x12, a Top Bar and even a Warre which was bought at a bee auction and generously donated by Hans Weijman. This variety allows members to experience the pros and cons of different hives, including large frames and frames with short lugs.

We held a Nosema testing day at the apiary at the end of April, organised by Elizabeth Knight. As well as testing bees from the apiary, members brought along samples of their own bees for testing.

In May, Alastair Welch demonstrated a way of doing swarm control when you can't find the queen, a very useful session.

A small queen-rearing group tried grafting for the first time this year with some success. It was a good learning experience, particularly around the special set up and tools needed. Carsten Wagner impressed with his new-found grafting skills.

The season ended with our annual picnic at the apiary in September. This year the weather was perfect and plenty of members attended. Thanks are due to Jacqui Sellers and Jenny Finbow for organising it.

Also, this year photographers from the Aldershot, Farnham and Fleet Camera Club joined some of our apiary sessions. This was part of a project hosted by the Rural Life Living Museum (RLLM), and it should result in a great bank of photos that we can use in printed and digital social media whilst it allowed the photographers to practise and extend their skills in an unusual environment! As well as still photographs they took some video with a drone to get a spectacular *bee's eye* view of the apiary both from above and flying through. Once the project is over at the end of the year, we will have official access to the material via the RLLM.

Many thanks are due to Rosalind Clague for managing the apiary and for organising the Saturday meetings. Leading apiary meetings is a team effort, and thanks are also due to Alastair Welch, Chris and Barbara Rushton, David Clague, Neil Gumbrell, Elizabeth Knight, Jon Springett, Becky Drozd, and Greg Cobb for their support at the apiary.

Thanks are also due to Jacqui Sellers, Jenny Finbow, Edyta Wilk, Nichola O'Sullivan, Julie Trice, and all who have supported the Bee Team by providing the tea and cake.

It is very important to note that none of the above would be possible without the hard work of the team led by Greg Cobb which keeps the apiary in good shape, in particular Carsten Wagner and Stewart Stuppell. Carsten did a great job keeping the hedges and overhanging branches trimmed and the grass strimmed.



Education

The demand for our introductory course for new beekeepers remains strong. Twenty-two people joined this year's course, compared with eighteen last year. The course followed our standard format of theory sessions in the Tilford Institute over the winter followed by practical sessions at the apiary. Eighteen continued to the practical sessions at the apiary and at the end of the summer many of these new beekeepers remained regular attendees at the Saturday morning meetings.

In recent years we have alternated between running Basic and Honeybee Health courses, and this year we ran a course for the Basic Assessment. Six members took the assessment, and all passed with either credit or distinction. In addition, Evie Whitear became our first member to receive the BBKA junior certificate.

Several members attended a Bee Health Day organised by our parent organisation, Surrey Beekeepers Association (SBKA) in conjunction with the National Bee Unit (NBU). It was particularly useful to hear about diseases and best practice for apiary hygiene and biosecurity directly from the NBU Bee Inspectors. They have a vast amount of practical experience, and their methods are backed up by work done by the scientists at the NBU. It was interesting to note that, according to the Bee Inspectors, Chronic Bee Paralysis virus (CBPV) is a significant and increasing threat to honeybee colonies in the UK and this is something we have seen at own apiary.

Special thanks are due to David Clague for all the hard work he put in organising our excellent educational programme and for maintaining our website and email system, and to Alastair Welch, one of the very few beekeepers in the country to hold the National Diploma in Beekeeping, who generously supported all our educational activities.

Thanks are also due to Chris and Barbara Rushton, Neil Gumbrell, Greg Cobb, and Elizabeth Knight for providing essential support to the beginners.

Yellow-Legged (Asian) Hornet (YLH)

Our YLH team, led by Julie Trice, has continued to keep us up to date via the monthly newsletter. They have also worked with Elizabeth Knight, our Communications Secretary, to ensure that the YLH threat was highlighted at our external events, including those at the RLLM, local fetes, and school visits.

The newsletter updates have highlighted the large and increasing number of YLH that have been seen in the UK this year and on how close this threat is getting to us. So far this year, up to Friday 31st October, there have been 530 credible sightings and 158 nests. This is a huge increase compared with the last couple of years: 2024 had 71 sightings and 24 nests and 2023 had 72 sightings and 56 nests. Furthermore, this year nests have been found in Surrey, the nearest being at Holmbury St Mary and Coldharbour.

Throughout the year, Julie has liaised with the other Surrey division YLH co-ordinators to pool knowledge, establish best practice, develop plans, and build communication bridges across county borders. In particular, Julie has worked in close partnership with Rebecca Davis, the Guildford YLH coordinator (and an Associate Member of FBKA), as our areas overlap so much and, in late August



a major monitoring programme was put in place in conjunction with Guildford Beekeepers with the aim of covering the western side of Surrey.

In September Julie and Rebecca visited Jersey which has been battling against YLH for several years. They marked and 'tinselled' a lot of YLHs and managed to track down two nests and gained good experience of the techniques that we are likely to need in the not-too-distance future.

For now, the NBU consider the UK to be in the 'Eradication Phase' and are continuing to act against the YLH and only they are allowed to release captured YLH to follow their flight directions and locate their nests. Over the winter they intend to review the evidence gathered in 2025 and if they decide that YLH have become an established population they may well withdraw from tracking and destroying nests. In which case we will need to take on this challenging but important task.

At the very least, it will be important next year that as many FBKA members as possible join the monitoring programme when requested.

Members Services

Elizabeth Knight continued to produce our monthly newsletter, which was always interesting and informative, so much so that this year it received a **Commendation at the National Honey Show!**

Janine Sparks continued to produce the popular 'This Month in the Apiary' article. We are lucky to have Janine writing articles for us: she achieved great success with her writing and photographs at this year's National Honey Show, including **1st place for a 'Calligram Poem' and 2nd place for a 'BBKA Essay'**.

Greg Cobb continued to arrange the bulk purchase of items which allows members to benefit from discounted prices. He arranged the purchase of:

- in November, fondant for 35 members (31 last year).
- in February, foundation for 26 members (31 last year).
- in August, Varroa treatments (Apiguard and Formic Pro) for 47 members (47 last year).

Finally, thanks are due to Neil Sellers who not only organised the hire of our extractors but also jarred apiary honey for sale at the Rural Life Living Museum shop.

Events and Public Activities

The second of our objectives is to advance the education of the public in the environmental and economic importance of bees, and this objective now includes raising awareness of the threat posed by the YLH.

Our brilliant events team led by Elizabeth Knight does a huge amount in relation to this objective, including:

- Rural Life Living Museum (RLLM) Activity Thursdays during school holidays;
- Several school visits, including South Farnham School and Normandy Village School;
- Several village fetes, including Churt, Bourne, and Tilford;
- Visits by Rowledge Beavers and Scouts.



The activity days at the RLLM were very successful with around 200 visitors each Thursday and we were very pleased with the feedback from the museum:

"... thank you for making Activity Thursdays and the summer holiday fun so brilliant and putting the Rural Life Living Museum on the map of places to be during school holidays."

This year members supporting public events were able to wear FBKA-Branded T-shirts. These T-shirts followed on from the engagement Elizabeth, Margaret Lennard and Geoff Redwood had in 2024 with Dana Plavecka, a Graphic Design student, who produced lots of great ideas for the FBKA logo, badges, and various other items. Elizabeth arranged the production of the T-shirts, which were available for members to buy.

The various other items included a bee board game which this year **won 1st place and the Moorcroft Bowl at the National Honey show** for "an Interesting or Instructive Exhibit related to bees or beekeeping not including live bees".

Huge thanks are due to Elizabeth and the team of Mark Barry, Ian Clifton, Greg Cobb, Rebecca Davis, Julia Deacon, David Fairhead, Jenny Finbow, Peter Fitzpatrick, Chris Grace, Margaret Lennard, Francesca Del Mese, Mark Pullen, Anne Schiettecatte, Jacqui and Neil Sellers, Janine Sparks, Stewart Stuppell, Becky Taylor, Julie Trice, Hans Weijman, and Rick Woollard.

Greg Cobb continued to coordinate the collection of swarms, an important public service, and this year around 20 swarm calls were received, compared to around 25 last year. Some of the swarms were used to populate the new hives in the apiary. The rest were passed on to members.

Finance

Our finances remain healthy: at the end of the year, we had cash in the bank of £31,239 compared with £27,839 last year. Details are provided in the Treasurer's Report and Accounts.

Chris Rushton has been our Treasurer, Membership Secretary, and FBKA Representative on the SBKA Council for many years. All these roles have required great commitment and hard work, and you will have seen from the detailed and accurate accounts over the last few years what a brilliant job Chris has done in maintaining the financial health of FBKA. He has also played an important role helping less experienced members at the apiary. It is, therefore, with great sadness that I have to report that, due to ill health, Chris is stepping down from these roles. We should all be very grateful for everything he has done for FBKA, and I will miss his common-sense approach to matters at our committee meetings.

Thanks are due to Becky Drozd for stepping up and supporting Chris over the last few weeks on the finances and membership renewals.

Thanks are also due to Graham Sharples for once again performing an independent check of our accounts.

Finally

I would like to thank Jenny Finbow, our Secretary, for all the work she does behind the scenes, especially in keeping the committee running smoothly.



I hope you have seen from this report how well we have done in meeting our charity's objectives and I hope you have enjoyed your beekeeping year with FBKA.

John Fail

31st October 2025