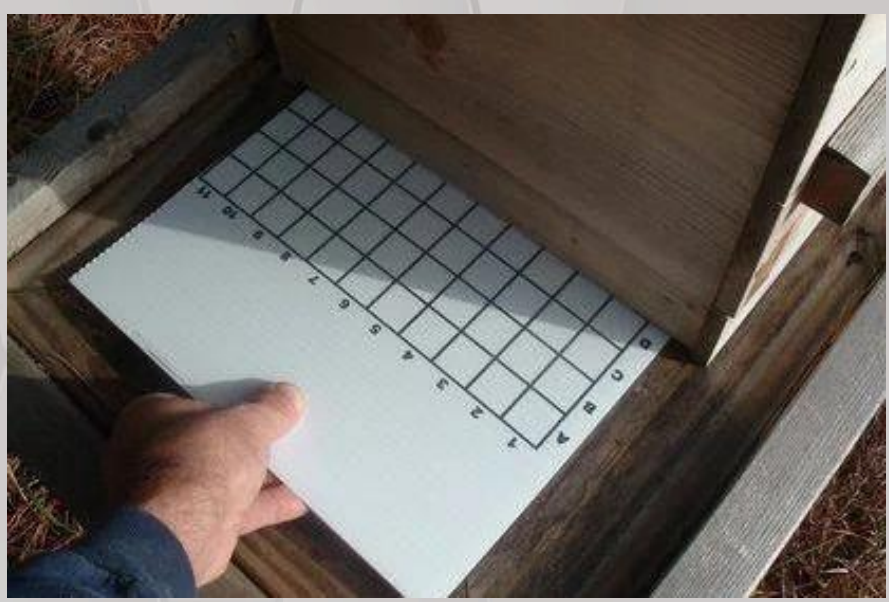
Queen Marking 2025

September 2025 | Edition 6

South East Herts Beekeepers Association

Promoting beekeeping and supporting beekeepers (since 1947)

Hertford, Hoddesdon, Cheshunt, Broxbourne, Ware, Bengeo, Goffs Oak, Cuffley, Stanstead Abbotts and surrounding areas.



Mite Check one two...

October should be the last month that you should be making changes to your bees.

Consider completing a last mite check to decide what to do with your colony, consolidate weak hives, add a final treatment, reduce entrance size, add reserves

Marmite Honey

Often referred to as the "Marmite Honey" Ivy honey is polarizing, love it or hate it late September and October is the prime time for the ivy to be flowering.

With very little alternative nectar sources ivy tends to be the autumn mono-floral honey that very few beek's want opting to leave it for the bee to eat as their winter stores.

It has a complex and robust flavour profile with a slightly bitter aftertaste; some even suggest it tastes like liquorice.

Whether you love it or hate it, its something that most beek's in the UK have to deal with.

Association News

Gary brook once again delivered a compelling talk last month for our members with a discussion on "The principles and practicalities of Varroa-treatment free beekeeping".

Gary has published a scientific review on treatment-free beekeeping with the Journal of Apicultural Research that undertook a review of the available studies on Varroa treatment to which the findings are very interesting.

The committee also met to discuss the plans for the winter months with regards to talks & meetings, more information on this will follow.

Inside this issue:

- October Overhaul
- SEHBKA Apiary
- Hive Talk – Treatment-Free Beekeeping
- Microlearning

October Overhaul

October's here, and it's time for a hive-wide tune-up before winter truly bites. The golden days of summer are behind us, and the bees are shifting gears—from bustling foragers to tight-knit survivalists. This month is all about tightening up operations, trimming the excess, and locking in security for the cold stretch ahead.

Think of October as the final curtain call before the long intermission. Your colonies need strong stores, snug quarters, and a clean bill of health to face the months ahead. It's not just about feeding—it's about fortifying. Every task you tick off now is a gift to your bees in January, when the frost bites and the nectar's long gone.

So grab your smoker, your hive tool, and your checklist—it's time to give your apiary the autumn attention it deserves.

If stores are light, keep feeding 2:1 syrup while temps allow. Switch to fondant once it's too cold for liquid.

Remove empty supers and reduce hive space to help bees stay warm and defend their stores

Mice love cozy hives—don't give them a chance.

Prevent condensation by ensuring your hive has proper airflow. A damp hive is a dead hive.

Run a mite count and treat if needed. Healthy bees = better overwintering.

Make sure you've got insulation, wraps, and emergency feed ready to go. Clean and store equipment in a dry safe place

October Check List

- [ ] Remove supers (Store equipment in a dry safe place)
- [ ] Ventilation check? (Inspect for damage)
- [ ] Varroa Check?
- [ ] Records up to date?
- [ ] Insulation ready?
- [ ] Emergency feed available?
- [ ] Woodpecker protection
- [ ] Mouse Guard on
- [ ] Heft your hive (Learn its weight)
- [ ] Final Feed with 2:1 syrup

Woodpeckers and mice can be a problem so mouse guards are important and if your apiary is in a wooded area you need to think about chicken wire for protection.

Are your colonies strong enough to last the winter, on average a nucleus should have a minimum of 3 frames of brood and a hive at least 6 frames of brood. If not combine them with other colonies to increase the strength of the hive.

Monitor your hives weight. By hefting your hive (lifting it from the back side) you will learn the weight of the hive with enough brood and stores in it, going into winter you will then know what weight you should be expecting.

Emergency food preparation can be done, if you are buying or making fondant ensure you have enough to support all your colonies through the winter if needed. Keep it stored in the freezer and when you need it get it out and defrost before placing on the hive.

This can all be completed through the month of October to try and best help your colonies survive the winter months.

Hive Talk

Treatment-free beekeeping

Up to 20% of bee colonies are naturally varroa resistant and if we give bees a chance, we can use them as a basis of building up a treatment-free apiary.

Resistance is usually based on varroa sensitive hygiene where the bees eject pupae infested with varroa.

Once established, resistance is not lost over the generations therefore once resistant always resistant.

Resistant bees generally have a good temperament and produce plenty of honey.

Achieving treatment-free status can be achieved by either finding colonies that are naturally resistant with a low mite drop and breeding from them or obtaining resistant bees from other beekeepers alternatively by following the 'Natural Beekeeping' route.

There are more and more associations around the UK "going" treatment-free. Wouldn't it be good if SEHBKA could be one of those pioneer UK associations.

Natural Beekeeping

in the UK natural beekeeping is a holistic, bee-centric approach that prioritizes working with bees' natural behaviours and needs, rather than controlling them with chemicals or excessive intervention.

It involves leaving sufficient honey for winter, avoiding pesticides and non-essential medications, and allowing bees to build their own resilience to parasites like the Varroa mite.

This method employs a variety of hives, including top-bar hives and skeps, and is supported by organisations such as the Natural Beekeeping Trust and groups like Hampshire Natural Bees

Understanding infestation rate

A rate over 3% or 3 in 100 bees is usually considered serious and may require treatment so when we are breeding for varroa resistance we are looking for a colony that consistently maintaining a 3% or lower infestation rate.

Varroa Sensitive Hygiene (VSH)

Varroa resistance through hygienic behaviour involves specialized worker bees that detect and remove pupae infested by Varroa destructor mites, a trait known as Varroa Sensitive Hygiene (VSH).

These bees identify Varroa-specific chemical cues on infested brood, which trigger the uncapping and removal of the affected pupae, thus disrupting the mite's life cycle and reducing mite and disease transmission within the colony.

Microlearning

Understanding bee thermoregulation

As the weather cools bees begin to cluster to maintain warmth, this top dives into the science of how bees regulate hive temperature, which is crucial for brood survival and colony health

Bee Clustering: Nature's Furnace

Clustering is the honeybee colony's primary strategy for surviving cold temperatures. As the mercury drops below ~14°C (57°F), bees begin to form a tight ball around the queen and any brood. Here's how it works

- Core vs. Mantle: The center of the cluster (core) stays warm—up to 34–36°C if brood is present. The outer layer (mantle) insulates the core and can drop to ~7°C, which is the survival threshold.
- Muscle Vibration: Bees generate heat by flexing their flight muscles without flying—a process called shivering thermogenesis.
- Rotation System: Bees rotate from the cold outer mantle to the warm center, ensuring no individual stays exposed too long.

Does Insulation Make Clustering Obsolete? Not at All.

Even with insulation, clustering remains essential. Insulation doesn't replace clustering—it enhances its efficiency:

Why Clustering Still Matters

- Bees regulate temperature dynamically based on external conditions. Even in insulated hives, they cluster tighter as temperatures drop and loosen as it warms.
- The cluster is a self-regulating unit—insulation helps reduce the energy needed to maintain its temperature but doesn't eliminate the need for clustering.

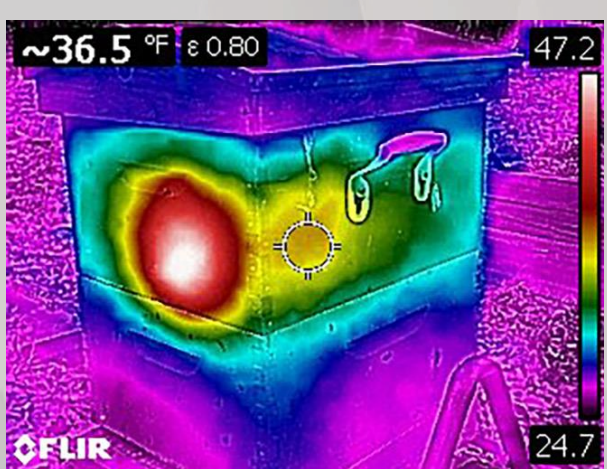
How Insulation Helps

- Reduces heat loss: Like wrapping a hot-water tank, insulation slows the escape of heat from the cluster.
- Prevents condensation: Moisture is a killer in winter. Insulation helps keep surfaces warm enough to avoid condensation dripping onto bees.
- Mimics natural cavities: In the wild, bees nest in thick-walled trees with high R-values. Typical pine boxes offer minimal insulation by comparison.

Cluster + Insulation = Efficient Heating

Think of the cluster as a space heater, and insulation as the walls of a well-sealed room. The heater still runs, but it doesn't have to work as hard. Less fuel (honey) is burned, and the room (hive) stays warmer longer.

So yes—**clustering remains vital**, even in insulated hives. Insulation simply helps bees **do more with less**, conserving energy and improving survival odds.



Useful Information

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South East Herts Bee Keeping Association

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