# APIARY NEWSLETTER

February 2026 Volume 113, Issue 1

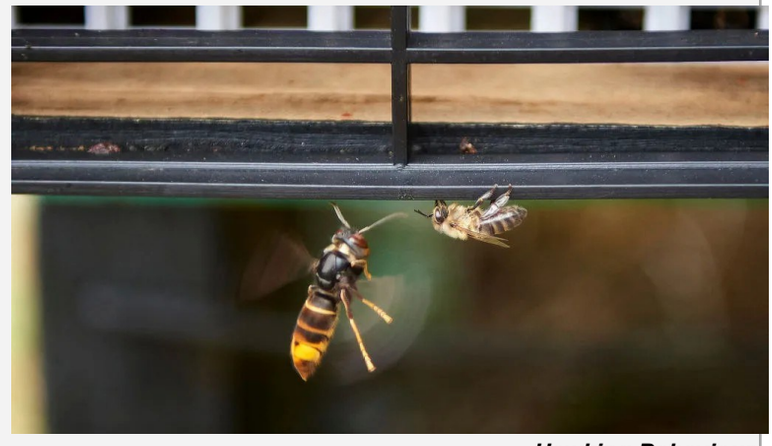
Founded in 1913


## THE ASIAN HORNET MENACE

*Vespa velutina*, the yellow legged hornet, commonly known as the Asian hornet, is native to Asia and was confirmed for the first time in Lot-et-Garonne in the South West of France in 2004. It was thought to have been imported in a consignment of pottery from China and it quickly established and spread to many regions of France. As of December 2022, Asian hornet is established in Spain, Belgium, Netherlands, Portugal, Italy, Switzerland, Germany and Jersey. The hornet preys on a wide range of insects including honeybees, *Apis mellifera*, and disrupts the ecological role they provide. It has also altered the biodiversity in regions of France where it is present and can be a health risk to those who have allergies to hornet or wasp stings. In 2016, the Asian hornet was discovered in the UK for the first time, in Tetbury. After 10 days of intensive searching, the nest was found and later destroyed. In subsequent years there have been further sightings with action taken to find and destroy nests. Since then, the insect has been spotted in several counties across the UK, including in Kent, Cornwall, Dorset, Devon, Hampshire, North Yorkshire, Wales and Staffordshire. An Asian hornet sighting was confirmed in the Tamworth area on 2 September 2019 .

***Male Asian Hornet***

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) is trying to prevent a nationwide Asian hornet invasion, currently through eradication of individuals and nests. But with the species becoming established in the UK, it is likely there is very little that can be done about it. Last year 161 nests were destroyed compared to the 24 nests found in 2024, indicating rapid spread.



***Hawking Behaviour***

It is almost inevitable that the Asian Hornet will be with us in Staffordshire this year and it could be as early as March-April. We encourage ecologists, environmental managers and members of the public to be vigilant, particularly in the Staffordshire area, and report any possible sightings.

The queens that were mated in the autumn will just be stirring from hibernation now. Around February/March these queens will start making their nests. Initially she will have to do everything herself, build a nest, protect it, laying a few eggs, but she is also after food. Around then is the perfect time to try and catch these queens.

NNSS
GB non-native species secretariat

**Alert!**

Report sightings of this species:
- with the iPhone and Android recording app: **Asian Hornet Watch**
- online at: **www.nonnativespecies.org/alerts/asianhornet**
- by email: **alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk**

# Yellow-legged hornet (aka Asian hornet)

## Species Description

**Scientific name:** *Vespa velutina*
**Native to:** Asia
**Habitat:** Nests usually high in trees and man made structures, sometimes closer to the ground; hunts honey bees, other insects and also feeds on fruit and flowers.

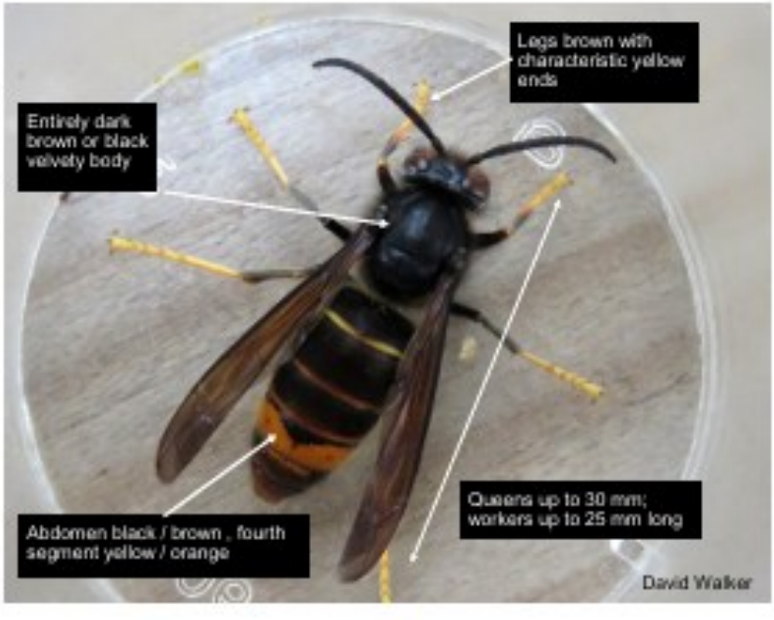
Not easily confused with any other species. Dark brown or black velvety body. Characteristically dark abdomen and yellow tipped legs. Smaller than the native European Hornet.

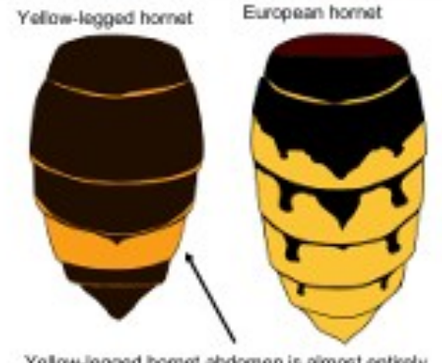
Introduced to France in 2004 where it has spread rapidly. A number of sightings have been recorded in the UK since 2016. High possibility of introduction through, for example, soil associated with imported plants, cut flowers, fruit, garden items (furniture, plant pots), freight containers, in vehicles, or in/on untreated timber. The possibility that it could fly across the Channel has not been ruled out.

A highly aggressive predator of native insects. Poses a significant threat to honey bees and other pollinators.

**Do not disturb an active nest. Members of the public who suspect they have found a yellow-legged hornet should report it with a photo using the details provided in the red box at the top of this ID sheet.**


## Key ID Features




Yellow-legged hornet abdomen is almost entirely dark except for 4th abdominal segment.


Version 6. Produced by Lucy Comwell, Olaf Booy (NNSS), Gay Marris, Mike Brown (National Bee Unit) with assistance from Colette O'Flynn (National Biodiversity Data Centre Ireland) Stuart Roberts (BWARS)

www.nonnativespecies.org

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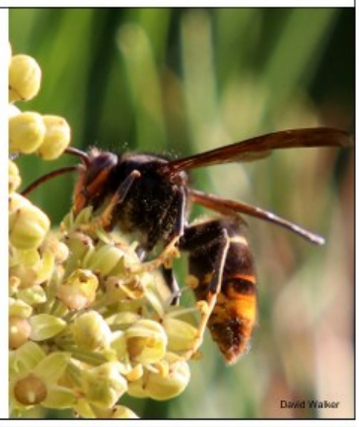


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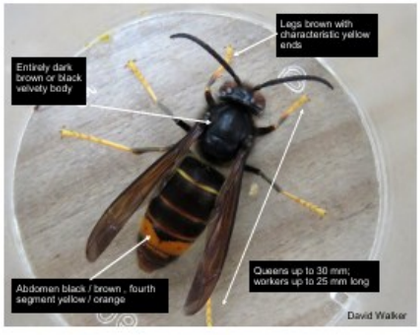
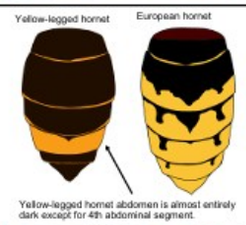




Version 6. Produced by Lucy Cornwell, Olaf Booy (NNSS), Gay Marris, Mike Brown (National Bee Unit) with assistance from Colette O'Flynn (National Biodiversity Data Centre Ireland) Stuart Roberts (BWARS)

**Yellow-legged hornet, aka Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*) for comparison**
- Queen up to 30mm long, worker up to 25mm long
- Legs yellow at the ends
- Dark brown / black abdomen with a yellow / orange band on 4th segment
- Head dark from above, orange from front
- Dark coloured antennae
- Entirely black velvety thorax
- Never active at night


## Similar Species

**European hornet (*Vespa crabro*)**
- Queen up to 35mm long, worker up to 30mm long
- Legs brown at the ends
- Yellow abdomen marked with brown on the upper part, not banded
- Head yellow from above, yellow from front
- Yellow antennae
- Thorax black with extensive brown markings
- May be active at night


**Giant woodwasp (*Urocerus gigas*)**
- Larger than yellow-legged hornet, female up to 45mm long
- Legs yellow
- Distinctive yellow and black banded abdomen
- Long cylindrical body unlike yellow-legged hornet which has an obvious waist
- Long yellow antennae
- Female has an obvious long sting-like appendage (ovipositor) which it uses to lay eggs in trees


**Hornet mimic hoverfly (*Volucella zonaria*)**
- Abdomen has more yellow stripes than yellow-legged hornet
- Legs darker than yellow-legged hornets
- Only one pair of wings (hornets and wasps have two pairs)
- Large, globular eyes


**Median wasp (*Dolichovespula media*)**
- More extensive yellow and orange colouration on abdominal segments than yellow-legged hornet
- Yellow markings on thorax unlike yellow-legged hornet


## Field Signs

Active April-November (peak August/September). Mated queens over winter singly or in groups, in various natural and man-made harbourages – underneath tree bark in cavities left by beetle larvae, in soil, on ceramic plant pots – potentially any small, well-insulated refuge. Makes very large nests in tall trees in urban and rural areas, but avoids pure stands of conifers. Will use man made structures (garages, sheds etc.) as nesting sites.

**For more information visit:**
www.nonnativespecies.org
www.nationalbeeunit.com

**Alert! Report sightings of this species:**
- with the iPhone and Android recording app: **Asian Hornet Watch**
- online at: **www.nonnativespecies.org/yellowleggedhornet**
- by email: **alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk**

www.nonnativespecies.org

Version 2. Produced by Lucy Cornwell (NNSS), Nigel Semmence (National Bee Unit). Based on 'Identification Information Sheet' Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris, France

# Yellow-legged hornet (aka Asian hornet) nests

**Many wasps and hornets, including yellow-legged hornet, produce two types of nest: primary nests and secondary nests. All wasp and hornet nests look similar. To identify a nest, watch for insects from a safe distance.**

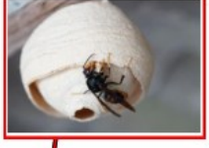
**Yellow-legged hornet primary nests:**
- Spherical with a small entrance hole at the base, usually 5 to 10 cm in diameter.
- Built in spring by a lone yellow-legged hornet queen, usually in a protected place such as brambles, a hedgerow, or in / on a building. **Only report primary nests if seen with yellow-legged hornets**

**Yellow-legged hornet secondary nests:**
- Pear-shaped, entrance hole halfway up the nest, up to 60 cm wide x 80 cm tall.
- Usually found in trees, may also be in buildings and hedges.
- **Use binoculars to identify secondary nests from a safe distance. Do not disturb suspected nests and retreat from any wasp / hornet nests if flying insects are observed.**

**Yellow-legged hornet,** *Vespa velutina*

**Secondary nests** in a tree canopy in summer (left)

**Primary nest**. All primary wasp and hornet nests look similar. **Only report if seen with yellow-legged hornet.**



**Secondary nest** in a hedge

**Secondary nest** in a building

# Nests of similar species

Secondary yellow-legged hornet (aka Asian hornet) nests may be confused with other wasp and hornet nests, or objects in trees. If you suspect you have seen a yellow-legged hornet nest, please use binoculars to check from a safe distance before reporting. See overleaf for details of where to report nests and find help with identification.

**Yellow-legged hornet,** *Vespa velutina*

**Secondary nest:**
- Usually found in trees, may also be in buildings and hedges.
- Pear-shaped.
- Entrance hole halfway up the nest.
- Up to 60 cm wide x 80 cm tall.

**Other objects in trees**
- Crow and magpie nests.
- Mistletoe.
- Squirrel dreys.

**Bird nest** in a tree:

**European hornet,** *Vespa crabro*

**Secondary nest:**
- Usually in hollow trees, chimneys, rarely in the open air.
- Cylindrical.
- Wide opening at the bottom.
- Usually 30 x 60 cm.

**Median wasp,** *Dolichovespula media*

**Secondary nest:**
- Usually in bushes that are less than 2 m tall.
- Conical.
- Small opening at lower end, off centre.
- Usually 20 x 25 cm.
- Nest of a *Dolichovespula* species shown below

**Primary nest:** Characteristic tube-shaped entrance (unlike primary Asian hornet nest).

**Common wasp,** *Vespula vulgaris*

**Secondary nest:**
- Usually on the ground, or in confined spaces in buildings.
- Round to conical.
- Small hidden opening at the lower end.
- Usually 30 x 35 cm.

## APPEARANCE AND BIOLOGY OF THE ASIAN HORNET

The Asian hornet is smaller than our native hornet, with adult workers measuring from 25 mm in length and queens measuring 30 mm. The abdomen is mostly black except for the fourth abdominal segment which has a yellow band. It has characteristically yellow legs and its face is orange with two brownish red compound eyes.

## ASIAN HORNET YEARLY CYCLE

*Spring*

After hibernation in spring, the queen, usually measuring up to 3 cm, will emerge and seek out an appropriate sugary food source in order to build up energy to commence building a small embryonic nest. During construction of the nest, she is alone and vulnerable, but she will rapidly begin laying eggs to produce the future workforce. As the colony and nest size increases, a larger nest is either established around the embryonic nest or they relocate and build elsewhere.

*Summer*

During the summer, a single colony, on average, produces 6000 individuals in one season. From July onwards, Asian hornet predation on honeybee colonies will begin and increase until the end of November and hornets can be seen hovering outside a hive entrance, waiting for returning foragers. This is the characteristic “hawking” behaviour. When they catch a returning bee, they will take it away and feed off of the protein rich thorax; the brood requires animal proteins which are transformed into flesh pellets and then offered to the larvae.

*Autumn*

During autumn, the nest’s priorities shift from foraging and nest expansion to producing on average 350 potential gynes (queens) and male hornets for mating, however, of these potential queens, only a small amount will successfully mate and make it through winter. After the mating period, the newly fertilised queens will leave the nest and find somewhere suitable to over-winter, while the old queen will die, leaving the nest to dwindle and die off. The following spring, the founding queen will begin building her new colony and the process begins again.

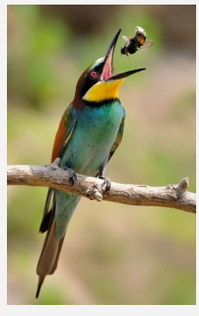
## OLD DOG WITH NEW TRICKS

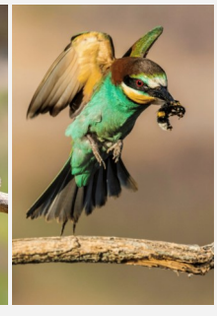
New research shows bumblebees have a remarkably successful method for fighting off Asian hornets.

Scientists from the University of Exeter observed that when attacked, buff-tailed bumblebees drop to the ground and take the hornets down with them. This causes the hornet to either lose its grip or the bee raises its sting and tussles until the hornet gives up. Researchers from the university witnessed over 120 such attacks with bumblebees winning each time.

## EUROPEAN BEE-EATER (Merops apiaster)

The National Institute for Agrarian and Veterinary Research in Oeiras, Portugal have studied the diet of the European Bee-eater to understand its role and predation intensity on the Yellow-legged Hornet. They found several hornet remains in some locations in Central Portugal. Although the importance of this predation remains to be determined, The Bee-eater could be one more agent in the fight to biologically control this pest, even though the two species do not coexist in much of the Iberian Peninsula. However, in the larger area of Greater Europe, it is predictable that the distribution range of the two species will overlap to a greater extent and the Bee-eater may play a much bigger role as a biological control agent.

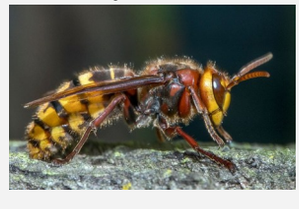




## ASIAN HORNET LOOK-ALIKES

The **European hornet**, *Vespa crabro* , is native to Britain and is slightly larger than the invaders. Queens of this species typically reach 3.5 centimetres long and the workers up to around 3cm

***European Hornet***



***Median Wasp***

The **Median wasp**, *Dolichovespula media*, is the largest non-hornet wasp which is native to Britain. They have yellow markings on their thorax, unlike the invasive hornet, as well as more extensive yellow on the abdomen.

[*Sources: Natural History Museum & Animal and Plant Health Agency (APHA) National Bee Unit website]*

# PARTNERSHIPS IN THE GAMBIA

Paul and I are visiting Gambia on 1 March with Partnerships in The Gambia.

Among the projects the charity has been supporting is Sulayman Manjang in Gunjur a bee entrepreneur . We have been funding him to build a bee house to his newly developed Apiary [pictures available] where he can extract honey,

and teach the craft of bee keeping to local novice beekeepers. He's also taking visitors around his Apiary as well as take as selling honey, soap, candles at his shop and the Gunjur Project. We are asking if anyone has any old but serviceable bee suits, hive tools or candle moulds we can donate to his enterprise.

Anyone can catch up with him on his Facebook page

https://www.facebook.com/share/1bTAKarCVT/

Thanks…….. ***Penny***

# BBKA FEBRUARY TALK

The next in our series of Zoom talks will be 'Honey Bees and Wild Bees: how they live together' with Cathy Horsley on Tuesday 17th February 2026, 7pm.

Dr Cathy Horsley is a Wilder Communities Officer at Devon Wildlife Trust, giving support to communities to act for nature across the county. She is trained as an ecologist, with a specialism in pollinators, and previously worked at the *Bumblebee Conservation Trust*, *Dartmoor National Park*, and in various museums. Her PhD is on *Himalayan balsam* and its impact on native plant pollination.

Zoom link:

*https://us06web.zoom.us//81233819992?pwd=DYMZxTImJjpRCLJjYjvbIxgybQQdSZ.1*

*Meeting ID: 812 3381 9992 Passcode: 527929*

A recording of this talk will be available on the BBKA Member Hub for those unable to watch live together with recordings of all previous talks.

***Richard Oliver***
*BBKA Trustee & Chair of E&H Committee*

# WINTER LOSSES

Several of us lost colonies before Christmas. Many had been strong hives with healthy queens and plenty of stores. We didn't see signs of Deformed Winged Virus, and there was a dearth of dead bees. Parasitic Mite Syndrome, with a varroa overload, has been suggested. There has also been speculation that, with the abnormal weather pattern last autumn, did the bees experience a false Spring, find no room to lay and abscond? or did the winter cluster form too early, consisting of summer rather than winter bees? What's been your experience? Is there an explanation you would like to offer?

Email your thoughts to David Primrose Education@southstaffsbeekeepers.com

Winter bee colony losses in the UK are significant, with recent data indicating winter losses around 20.8%, often driven by starvation, Varroa mite-transmitted viruses (like Deformed Wing Virus), queen failure, and damp conditions. While honey bees remain active, populations drop from 50-60,000 to under 10,000, requiring sufficient stores and healthy winter bees to survive until spring.


## Winter Meetings with 2025 Beekeeping Candidates

To maintain strong connections with our 2025 beginner beekeeping candidates, we have committed to meeting throughout the winter months. These gatherings take place on the first Saturday of each month, ensuring continuity and ongoing support for our new members.

## January Gathering: Braving the Cold

Our latest meeting was held on Saturday, 3rd January, despite challenging winter conditions with snow and ice covering the ground. While we refrained from opening the hives due to the cold, we took the opportunity to heft the hives and check that the entrances remained clear of both snow and any dead bees. This essential maintenance ensures the wellbeing of our bee colonies during harsh weather.

## Building Relationships and Encouraging Initiative

A strong sense of camaraderie has developed among the group, with five new beekeepers regularly attending and actively contributing ideas to improve our practices. Their enthusiasm and willingness to engage in discussions is truly refreshing and bodes well for the future of our beekeeping community.

## Hive Allocation and Guidance

Each new beekeeper has been allocated their own hive, giving them the responsibility to make decisions under the guidance of our experienced members. This hands-on approach supports learning and helps foster confidence in their beekeeping abilities.

## Bee Chats and New Initiatives

Our meetings are not only about practical work. Over coffee and cake—Penny's banana cake being a highlight—we enjoy lively Bee Chats. These conversations are an opportunity to explore new initiatives aimed at retaining our second-year beekeepers and enhancing their knowledge and skills. This collaborative spirit ensures ongoing development and strengthens our group as a whole.

***Tony Ward***

# FEBRUARY - PLANTS FOR POLLINATORS

## Helleborus

Hellebores are classic plants for winter interest, with elegant, nodding blooms in shades of green, white, pink or ruby. These perennials have a long flowering period, lasting well into spring. Mainly evergreen with handsome leaves, they thrive in shadier spots.

## Salix alba var. sericea

*S. alba var. sericea is a bushy medium-sized deciduous tree with striking, silvery-grey, narrow-lanceolate leaves up to 10 cm in length. Insignificant, slender, drooping yellow catkins in spring*

## Eranthis hyemalis

*Winter Aconite A perennial 10 cm in height, with cup-shaped bright yellow flowers from late winter, surrounded by divided leafy bracts.*

## Erysimum 'Bowles's Mauve'

*A bushy evergreen perennial to 75 cm, with narrow, dark grey-green leaves and erect racemes of rich mauve flowers 2 cm in width.*

## Mahonia × media

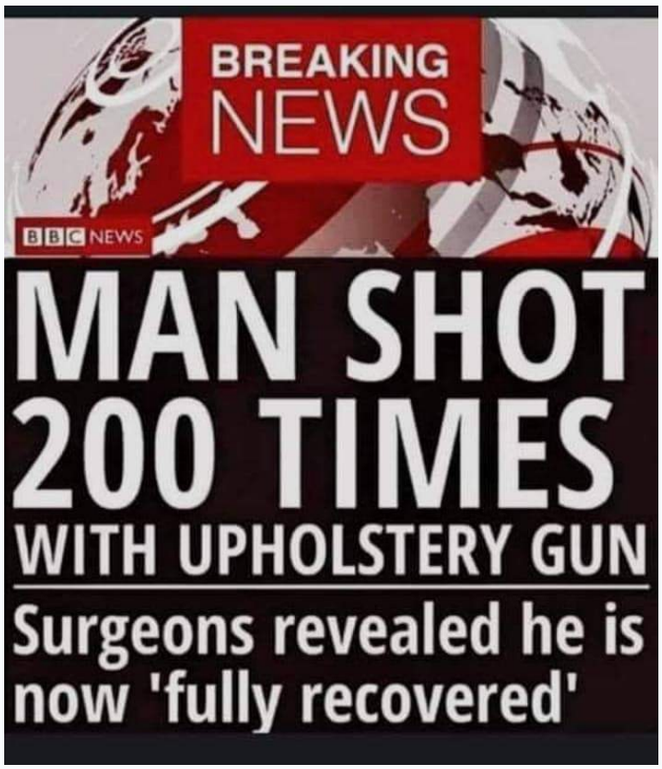
*'Lionel Fortescue' is a large, erect evergreen shrub with spiny, pinnate leaves to 45 cm in length. Flowers bright yellow, scented, in clustered upright racemes to 40 cm in length. Berries blue-black .*

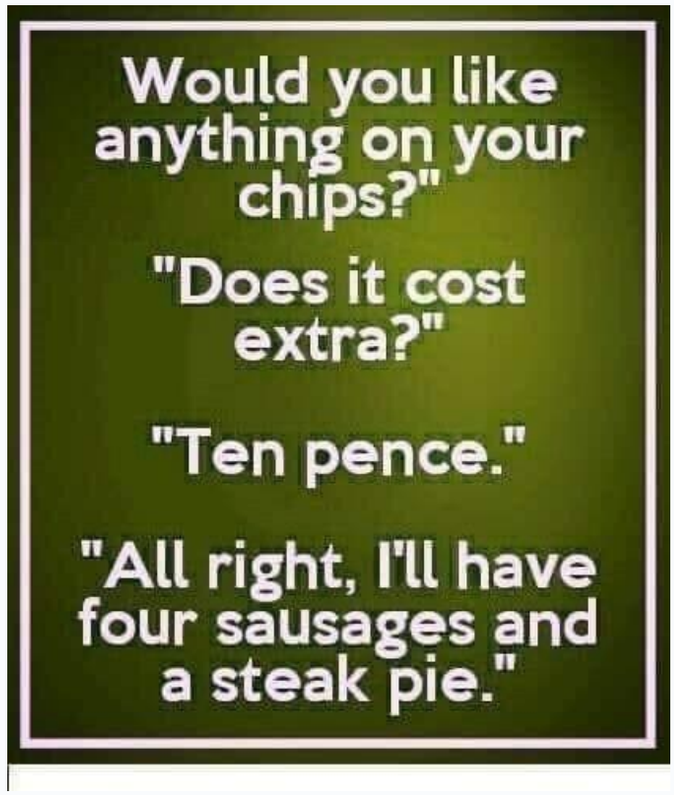
## Sarcococca orientalis

*Sweet Box is a short growing evergreen shrub which produces extremely fragrant blooms (reminiscent of hyacinths) from late winter into early spring. It's one of those plants that you almost always smell long before you see it.*

# RANDOM THOUGHTS FROM THE APIARY

What's the difference between a Lamborghini and a dead body?
"I don't have a Lamborghini in my garage."




**"**While it's very true that money can't buy you happiness, I'd rather sob in a Mercedes than on a bicycle"

If anyone has a '*Random Thought* ' they would like to add to this article..... maybe something you would like to get off your chest…then please send it to: **ssbka-mail@southstaffsbeekeepers.com**

# CAN YOU FIND THE QUEEN

Have a good look around this edition of the Newsletter and see if you can spot where she is ?

In the Honey Show edition she was admiring the embroidery of a Bumblebee on page 3 from the sleeve of the handmade bee suit

Click on any word in the Newsletter highlighted in **blue** for more details …..or ctrl+-Click the logos either side of here to go to the association website