The London Beekeepers' Association
LBKA News

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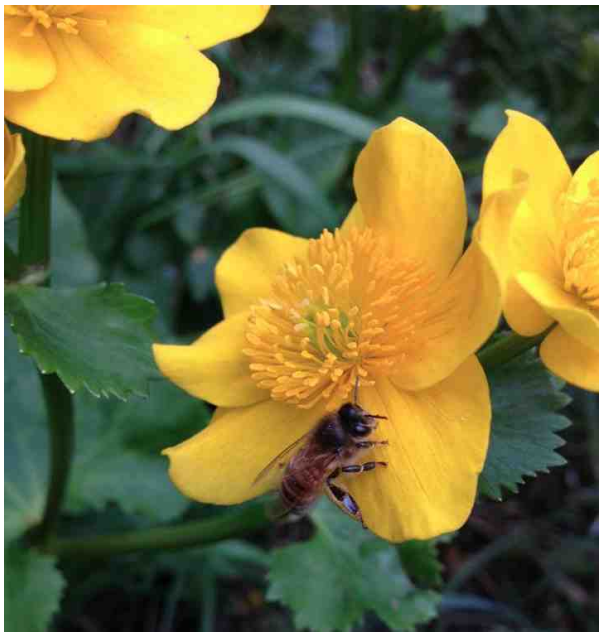


From our Chair

Karin Courtman
chair@LBKA.org.uk

Welcome to the LBKA April Newsletter. Spring is definitely here for the bees and we beekeepers have done our first inspections of the year. Most colonies that have made it through the Winter should now survive.

Swarm season will soon be here. Last year was such a cold late Spring and such a wet Summer that there were many fewer swarms. Over the whole of last season we only had 6 swarms brought into the apiary where we hive them, compared with over 30 for the previous year. We sold some of the nucs made up from these swarms at the end of last year and the others did not survive the Winter, so unfortunately the LBKA has no overwintered nucs to sell to members at the moment.

Our first weekend beekeeping course is at the end of this month so by the beginning of May we will have up to 30 beginners looking for a mentor and then up to 30 more at the end of May from the May course. Thanks to everyone who has volunteered to help with the April course. Please do volunteer to be a mentor as it is a rewarding and promotes the learning of the mentor and well as the mentee.

Announcements

Monthly meeting

April's monthly meeting will be on Sunday 13th April at 11:00 on the subject of **swarm prevention and control**.

Before this, however, we will have an **EGM** where **LBKA members will be able to vote on two motions** that have been proposed by members. Details will be circulated to members in advance. There'll be the opportunity for each motion to be presented by its proposer and time for discussion. The first motion will be **Abby Taubin's proposed amendments to the constitution** (thanks to Simon Wilks for helping prepare this). Details of these were circulated to members on 8th March. The second motion will be **Sharon Bassey's proposal**

that "in future our AGM will be only for association business and not taken up by a speaker."

Because of the EGM, please note that our monthly meeting may last a bit longer than usual.

Angela and Jon demonstrate swarm capture last month.

Possible site for members' bees

Karin has news of a possible site for hives for a member/members with the Basic available near Victoria Theatre.

E-mail her at **chair@lbka.org.uk** if you are interested.

Britain's Next #TopSupplier

Source: http://blog.ocado.com/2014/03/20/and-britains-next-top-supplier-is/

We are pleased to report that member **Hannah Rhodes** of **Hiver Beers** (http://www.hiverbeers.com/) has won Ocado's "Britain's Next #TopSupplier" competition with her honey Craft Beer.

Judge Tom Kerridge said "the entire Hiver product, from taste to packaging, has been carefully crafted". Even her business cards have that thoughtful touch: they're laced with wildflower seeds so you can plant them and create food for bees.

The other Judge Sir Stuart Rose said "Hannah and her Hiver Beers had it all – an intriguing back story, a passion for the industry, a great tasting, quirky product… but Hannah's holistic approach to her product and brand is what really sold it for me".

Hannah donated some of her award-winning beer to our forage-creation event last month. Thanks Hannah!

Tatler's interview opportunity

Last month, we emailed members to say that the Tatler Magazine wanted to interview and photographer some of our members and why we like beekeeping. We had a tremendous response with over 40 of our members offering to take part.

Sadly, Tatler decided not to go ahead with the article after all. A shame. Hopefully there'll be similar opportunities in future.

Practical training for members

LBKA is trying to arrange practical instruction for its members in the handling of the queen. It also intends to combine this practical apiary session with the mechanics of a specific brood disease inspection. Anticipated topics covered are:

1. Finding the queen. Handling, marking, clipping, caging and releasing her back into the colony. We will be practising on drones.
2. Full brood inspection, with emphasis on examining for evidence of EFB and AFB.

Although we should check for any evidence of disease each time we open the hive it is BBKA recommended practice to undertake a specific disease inspection for each colony at least twice per annum. The techniques used differ from the normal routine hive inspection.

Subject to demand, this is likely to take place on a Saturday or Sunday morning in May or early June and in south London. Please email **education@lbka.org** if interested.

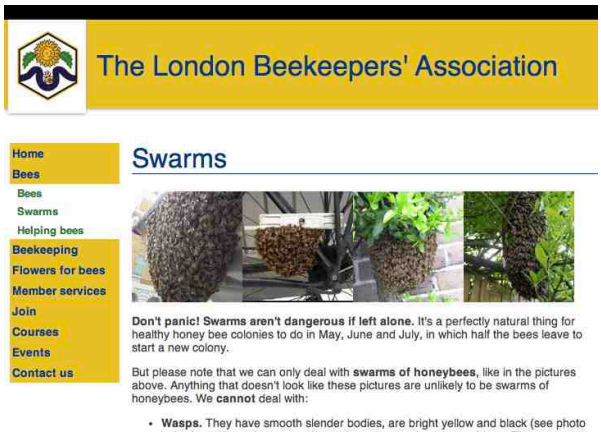
External training opportunities for members

For the past two years Kent Beekeeping **Association has been operating a series** of beekeeping courses at the Kent Science Resource Centre in Sittingbourne. The classroom teaching environment and the laboratory facilities are outstanding. Both are extremely modern and superbly equipped. A series of courses is again offered for 2014 and LBKA members, as a neighbouring county, have been offered access to all these courses.

The list of courses is available at **http://www.ksrcbees.org.uk/** and booking may be completed on-line. Please do check what is on offer on the website as this is an outstanding opportunity so close to home.

Volunteers

Thank you to members who have offered their services as volunteers. We are pleased that **Barbara Linder** is now our **Swarm Coordinator** and will be the **LBKA's public contact point** for this. We are also pleased that **Emily Abbot** will be **Volunteer Coordinator** and will help us find volunteers for our various events. Thank you both.



We are still looking for volunteers for **Nucs Coordinator** (to maintain a list of members looking to purchase nucleoli (nucs) of bees from us), **Librarian** and **backup volunteers** (to help at events). Please email services@lbka.org.uk if you can help or would like to find out more.

If you interested in helping out during our **beekeeping course** 10-11th May, please contact **Jon Harris** at **treasurer@lbka.org.uk**.

Appeal for Mentors

Howard Nichols

If you have been keeping bees for 2 or 3 seasons this is an appeal to you to help your association by becoming a mentor. This is a worthwhile activity which seems to help the mentor as much as the people being mentored. It involves no more than arranging for one or two new people to be with you this summer when you do your hive inspections. Most beekeepers open their colonies on the same day each week as this fits in with checking for queen cells. This also fits in with being a mentor as all is consistent.

The mentor makes the arrangement with the new beekeeper and it is usually no more than confirming the time and date by email or text. It requires very little effort by the mentor and the mentee is required to supply his or her own beesuit. The arrangement is nearly always mutually beneficial.

The mentee learns how to start to handle a colony of bees. The mentor also learns, as he needs to address the questions asked. It also encourages the beekeeper to be more disciplined in good apiary practice. None of us are experts, we all just learn from each other, and a person who has kept bees for

a couple of seasons will know a lot more than they may realise. As the 1st Century AD Roman philosopher, Seneca the Younger puts it "Even while they teach, men learn". In fact, he said "Homines dum docent discunt" because he was that kind of guy and spoke that way. On a serious note, please do volunteer. If you do not like it then it is only for 1 summer. It is not a lifetime commitment. Contact **mentoring@lbka.org.uk** to register your interest.

If you're unsure about your ability to mentor, please do chat to our Apiary manager **Richard Glassborow** at **apiaries@lbka.org.uk.** We will **support new mentors**, so please do talk to us if you might be able to help.

LBKA at RHS Great London Spring Plant Fair

Mark Patterson

LBKA was present at this months RHS Great London Spring a Plant fair on the 1st and 2nd of April.

We were there with volunteers **Barbara** and **John** helping committee members **Angela** and **Mark** man our stall. We gave out advice and pamphlets to show visitors about gardening for pollinators, we also had a model hive and honey extracting equipment to demonstrate honey processing as well as examples of bee keeping clothing and equipment.

It was surprising just how many visitors already have bees or are keen to garden for them. During the 2 day event we were able to sell many of our LBKA seed packets which generated some money for the association.

The theme for this years show was 'gardening in a changing climate' and coincided with the publication of the 'intergovernmental panel on climate change' (IPCC) latest report on climate change. Mark was asked to speak as a guest lecturer on the subject of climate change and what it means for pollinators. His talk attracted a healthy audience and was one of the best attended lectures at the Lindley Hall. Social media site London Buzzing were present and ran a live blog and twitter coverage of the lecture which generated some questions via email and twitter. The lecture was recorded and should be available as a podcast in the near future via the RHS website.

It's your newsletter!

We welcome contributions to the newsletter from members. This will make it more interesting. It could an article or blog post that you've published elsewhere (see Emily Heath's contribution this month), your perspective on something, what's going on in you apiary or a write-up of an event you've been to. Volunteering to be a contributor to write material when needed is also helpful; for example, for writing up LBKA events including monthly meetings. You could even use the newsletter to sell nucs to members or other similar beekeeping services. Enquires and contributions to services@lbka.org.uk.

Thanks to Mark Paterson, Howard Nichols Richard Glassborow, Emily Abbot, Emily Heath, Fiona Matheson, Helen Cave and Simon Wilks for their contributions this month.

April in the apiary

Where should we be with our colonies at this time of year

March has been a good month weather wise and colony populations should now be increasing. Drones should start to appear, and there should be sufficient available forage for the bees to be self-sufficient if the weather holds good.

Action to be taken this month includes the following:

- **Remove mouseguards** (if already not removed in March) and replace with a clean, sterilised entrance block.
- **Find and mark the Queen.** If the queen is unmarked then this is an ideal time to find and mark her. There will not be an easier time. The

colony is now going to continue to expand in numbers up until July whereupon it will start to contract. Swarm control will be considerably easier with a marked queen.

- **Colony build up**. Is the colony continuing to build up? A significant benefit of keeping colony records is that the number of frames of brood is recorded.
- **Varroa mites**. Check mite drop if not already done in March.
- **First full inspection.** If not done in March then the first full inspection of the hive should be carried out in early April. From then on regular inspections should be made.

When inspecting a colony, **5 questions should be asked and action taken if appropriate**.

1. Is the queen present and laying?

You do not need to find the queen. If there are eggs or newly hatched larvae then this is evidence that she was in the hive and laying 3 or 4 days ago.

2. Has the colony enough room?

This is a 2-part question, being enough room for the queen to continue to lay eggs and enough room for the colony to store nectar. If not then provide room by adding a super.

3. Are there any queen cells?

Queen cups are to be expected and should normally be ignored unless containing an egg. Queen cells require swarm control action by the beekeeper. If the bees have sufficient space then swarm control should not normally be an issue until May. If there is insufficient space in the hive, leading to congestion and inhibition of the circulation of queen substance, then swarming can be an April problem. Therefore, ensure that the colony has sufficient space. Add a super if necessary.

4. Are there signs of disease?

This is a comprehensive question but the strategy is best approached by being familiar with healthy brood. Anything that does not fit this description is, prima facie, suspicious.

Healthy unsealed brood is pearly white in colour, evenly laid and lies in a “C” shape in the cell. Healthy sealed brood is light brown in colour, evenly laid and with slightly raised dome cappings.

5. Are there enough stores until the next inspection?

The equivalent of 2 full National brood frames is regarded as more than sufficient at this time of year, even if there is a serious and prolonged downward turn in the weather.

April in the forage patch

Mark Patterson
Forage Officer

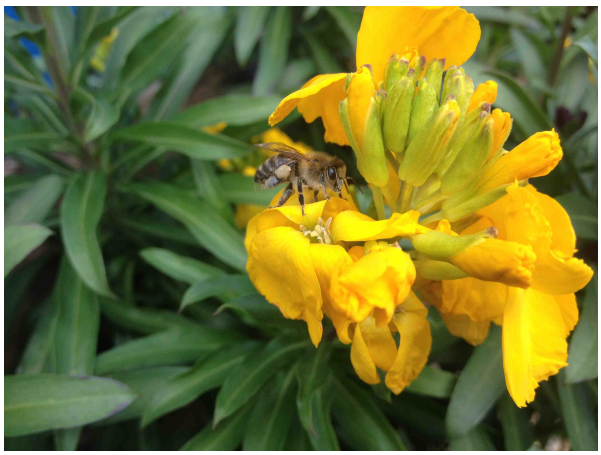
Spring seems to have arrived early this year with many of our spring flowering bulbs and early herbaceous plants flowering a few weeks ahead of the normal. As we move into April most of our tulips, hyacinths and daffodils have either been and gone or are going over. Crocuses have long since stopped flowering and our bees now turn to Willow's, fruit trees and herbaceous plants for pollen and nectar.

Broad bean. *My autumn sown beans are attracting lots of bees right now.*

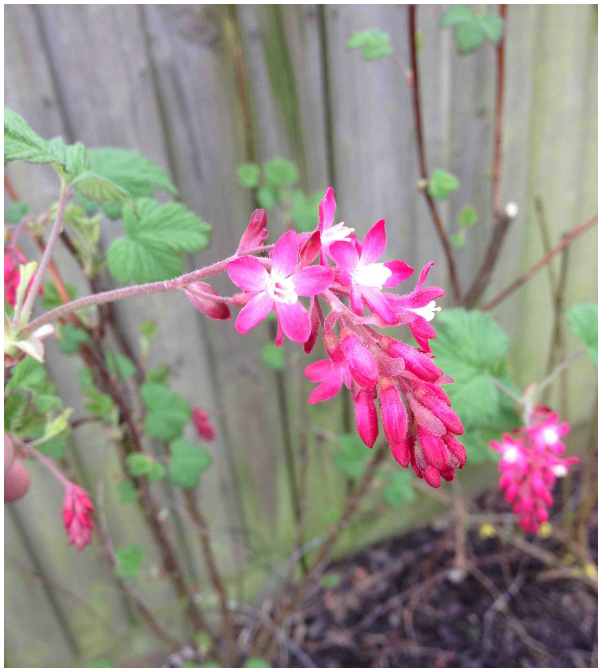
Plum blossom.

Right now in my garden the bees are busy working Anenemones. These have a long flowering period for a bulbous plant. Mine have been flowering since February and ate still going strong. Other plants drawing the bees into my garden are the wall flowers, both the regular bedding type varieties and the everlasting wall flower 'Bowles mauve.' Flowering currant 'Ribes' are in flower and attracting the bees for their nectar alongside early apple, plum, pear and peach blossom. Quite amazing is my cat mint, Oregano and escalonia flowering- all plants that would not normally be in flower until may or later. In some parts of the city Lavenders, Abelia, ceonothus and valerian have also been seen flowering- all way ahead of their usual flowering times. This early abundance of good could mean were in for an early swarm season so keep on your toes and check your bees regularly so they don't run ahead of you.

Now is an excellent time to sow your LBKA seed mix. Just clear the ground, take to a fine filth and scatter. After a week or two you should see the first seedlings and with luck your first flowers within 6 weeks. I sowed the mobile meadow a few weeks ago and already I have the first flowers emerging.



A honey bee working wall flower.



Flowering currant

Last month's meeting

Howard Nichols

Attendance at the meeting was about 50 in number and these ranged from new beekeepers to older, more established beekeepers. At least 30 people had brought a sample of bees (30 bees minimum sample) for Nosema testing. The weather was warm and sunny, beginning of Spring, and this helped to generate a favourable atmosphere all around. Many members had made their first full colony inspection of the year the preceding day.

The objective of the meeting was the testing of bees by microscopic examination for Nosema. The meeting was organised and led by Richard Glassborow and ran from a prompt 11.00 am start to 12.30 pm. We had the use of 4 good quality compound microscopes, including the 2 new acquisitions by the association. Jon Harris had also thoughtfully produced colour-printed examples of Nosema spores so that all members had visual examples of what they were searching for.

It was heartening to see so many beekeepers have heeded the warnings about this increasing threat to our bees and are now taking proactive action at this time of year. Nosema was found in at least 1 sample but most were clear. The meeting also seemed to spawn a genuine interest in the use of microscopes and the sub-optical world of beekeeping. On many slides a variety of other micro organisms were observed including:

- Branched plumose hairs. These are an example of the efficiency with which bees collect pollen.
- Other bee parts including legs.
- Varroa mites.
- An undigested crocus pollen grain was found in Billy Ashton's sample. The crocus pollen grain is a distinct saucer like shape and easily identifiable. Crocus is, of course, a pollen source at this time of year. The grain was confirmed by comparison with a fuschin-stained slide of the same type of grain, which happened to be at hand.

To any new members who have not been to our Sunday monthly meetings please do come along and give it a try. You will find a friendly atmosphere and informative and passionate discussion about many beekeeping aspects. The monthly meetings are all included within your membership and are free to all. Even the tea, coffee and cake are free! As the beekeeping season is now underway then the monthly meeting is also an opportunity to obtain assistance with some of the more challenging areas of apiculture.

This meeting in March has become a regular feature of the LBKA calendar. For at least the last 8 years it has been run by **Alan Kime**, a member of Ealing beekeepers who is also an experienced and knowledgeable microscopist. Alan was unable to run this year's meeting due to his wife's ongoing illness and may not be available for the future. **We would like to thank him for all the help he has given to the LBKA in this area over recent years.** It is most appreciated by all. We do hope that Alan will pay an unexpected visit to one of our monthly meetings. If he is able to do so then he will be made most welcome.

Emily's perspective

*Member **Emily Abbot** attended the meeting and gives a personal perspective*

I loved my microscope when I was little, and I dusted it off awhile ago thinking I'd use it for a bit of DIY Nosema testing. I was gutted to discover that it was more toy than scientific instrument, at 13 it had felt so much more grown up!

Imagine my relief then when **Richard Glassborow offered to run a Nosema testing session** at the monthly meeting! 5 microscopes laid out on benches and about 40 of us all seated at tables clutching our dead bees. I'd caught mine by putting a jar over the hole in the crown board for the poor unsuspecting bees to fly into. Lid on, they went into the freezer.

I wasn't the only one who felt like a murderer, the start of the meeting was full of guilt ridden stories of death by freezing. The guilt passed as soon as we started to get to business and stuck into the task of pulling the heads off our bees. Richard told us that this was because the bacteria is found in the gut so we only need the abdomens. There was yellow stuff squirting around – gross but fun. The abdomens were all put into a small plastic bags, the sandwich bag type, and then a squirt of water added so that we could pulp the abdomens up with the water. I crushed mine with the jar I'd caught them in. You don't need to make a smooth pulp or anything - just squash them up enough for you to be able to get a drop of yellowy liquid out and onto a glass slide that goes under the microscope. I used the end of a plastic knife to dip into the bee mess and dab a yellow blob of it onto the glass plate. The top tip is not to share 'dippers' (but then that's a lesson for life too), as once used it's contaminated so you'll not know which bees are clear or not.

On top of the glass slide goes a thin square of plastic which spreads the yellow blob out so that it makes a colourless film that's thin enough to allow us to look at it in detail under the microscope. The microscopes are amazing, Richard gave us a lesson on how to use it, how to start at low magnification, and then when you had found and focussed on something interesting, to increase magnification, refocus and repeat.

The Nosema cells are visible at a magnification of 400. It was a window onto an amazing world, and

for healthy bees the view through the microscope had the feeling of a peaceful painting, with space and calmness surrounding scattered golden pollen grains which looked like weird cut stones and shapes you could stare at for hours. I wax a bit lyrical as this was in sharp contrast to the one colony which had Nosema, where the view through the microscope was more white and blue and busier as it was crowded with translucent grains of rice: the Nosema bacteria.

The hive that has Nosema is apparently doing well and showing no signs of stress which is good, and forearmed with this health check I expect the keeper will be able to help them flourish. It was a fascinating morning, and a reassuring feeling to know that my bees are (or were!) free of Nosema so at least I can rule that out if something's looking odd next time I inspect them!

Bee Friendly Planting at Kennington Park Road, Oval

Emily Abbot

Mark Patterson, the LBKA Forage Officer, organised a forage planting session free to all our members. He had found a housing estate on Kennington Park Road, just next to Oval tube station that was turning much of its communal areas over to wild meadow beds.

It was a beautiful sunny afternoon, and armed with wheelbarrows, spades, forks, trowels, buckets of LBKA seed mix, plug plants to be scattered across the meadow areas, and about 10 LBKA volunteers we dug, prepared and planted huge beds that in a few weeks time will be beautiful wild flower meadows and food for our bees. I really enjoyed the day, and ended up spending a whole sunny afternoon there, enjoying the company and the fun of local children joining in, digging, planting and watering, and getting to grips with worms!

Mark had tweeted the event too inviting all comers to join in, so we were visited by BKA members from Somerset who were passing through, filmed by a student for his coursework, and visited by a couple who wanted to find a safe home for a male stag beetle they'd found. London really is an extraordinary place, and doing things like this brings so many together, and means you cross paths and spend time with people you wouldn't in your normal day to day routine.

And at the end of it all, a Hiver Beer provided by LBKA member Hannah Rhodes - I can't tell you how good it tasted after all the effort in the afternoon sun. Thank you Hannah! I'd thoroughly recommend these events, they're good fun and help our bees so keep your eyes peeled for others, or if you have ideas then do let Mark know.

LBKA Apiaries

Richard Glassborow
LBKA Apiary officer

From time to time we are approached to keep bees on a piece of open space, somebody's garden or rooftop. Some of these opportunities are only suitable for one or two colonies but some offer scope for more.

So the LBKA has been developing its apiaries policy. If an enquiry looks feasible in the first instance it is

viewed and assessed for suitability either as a potential and much needed teaching apiary, to be run by an LBKA member who is prepared to provide mentoring, or to be handed over to a member for them to keep their own bees. Priority will be given to members who would like to keep bees but who do not have suitable facilities themselves. Other factors, such as experience, may have to be taken into consideration in matching beekeepers to new apiaries. In either case a risk assessment is carried out before progressing.

Sometimes we take an intermediary response where a potential apiary seems to offer opportunities for the LBKA but for some reason it is not possible to take advantage straight away. In this case it is felt that establishing a presence with a "holding" colony may be prudent while longer-term plans can be developed.

Two such opportunities are currently underway. The first, hosted by Mudchute Farm and sponsored by City law firm Ashurst, is well underway and will provide a much-needed teaching apiary in East London. Unfortunately something shrunk in the construction stage and the first structure is too small. But expansion is underway and hives are being prepared to introduce in time to stock this season.

The second new opportunity is at Morden College in Blackheath. This is a residential care home for the elderly and is set in over 10 acres of beautifully kept grounds.

We are as yet uncertain as to the full potential of this site but would like to establish a presence as soon as possible. It would not be suitable for a novice beekeeper but any more experienced members interested in keeping a couple of colonies here please contact apiaries@lbka.org.uk.

Meanwhile our more established apiaries are also undergoing change. There are plans to move the Brockwell apiary, only a hundred metres or so but, as we all know, moving bees a short distance can be, well… calendar dependant? But we hope to get a nice new, bigger apiary out of this move.

Last year we lost the apiary at the Art4Space studios in Stockwell to developers. We hope to be invited back once the builders have finished.

But to compensate, the apiary at Eden community garden in St Paul's churchyard, Clapham, has been expanded. We currently have 5 thriving colonies (but too much varroa!). One of the colonies (left) had a complicated history last season but has

emerged from the winter a monster. By the first inspection on March 15 it was already capping its first super of 2014! By the end of March it was on 14 frames of brood and 3 supers.

If you are a beekeeper, novice or experienced, looking for an apiary, please do contact Richard Glassborow at apiaries@lbks.org.uk. We can't promise anything but we need to be aware of demand as, when and where supply opportunities arise.

LBKA's Spring Lecture

Emily Heath
*Member and **Adventuresinbeeland** blogger*

*LBKA's Spring lecture was given by David Rudland (FERA Bee Inspector and instructor) on the importance of bringing colonies out of winter and into the Spring. Member **Emily Heath** attended and wrote an article about the talk on her excellent http://adventuresinbeeland.com/ blog. Emily keeps her bees at the Ealing Beekeepers Association's local apiary. **If you've interesting articles that would interest members, please consider offering them for our newsletter.***

On Wednesday evening I went to a London Beekeepers Association (LBKA) talk by David Rudland on the topic of **Bringing bees from winter into spring**.

David and his wife Celia (who came to the meeting too) are commercial beekeepers in Surrey with around 180 hives, producing honey, selling bees and running training courses. David is also a FERA seasonal bee inspector. There are only about 350 commercial beekeepers in the UK, representing about 1% of total beekeeper numbers here.

His talk reminded me that you can never say "I know it all now" – researchers are constantly making new discoveries that have deeply practical relevance to the best way to look after our bees. This is a post about practical beekeeping – it may not make much sense to beginners and probably won't be very interesting for non-beekeepers! You have been warned.

Winter management – jobs to do over the winter

"I like being controversial", David said with a big grin on his face. He then proceeded to tell us why all sorts of things most UK beekeepers do over winter are unnecessary/a bad idea.

Inspecting

Lots of beekeepers avoid opening their hives during winter, for fear of chilling the bees and brood. David however recommends doing a quick two minute check in December and January (as long there's not a blizzard or horizontal rain going on). The idea is to check for brood if you're considering treating with oxalic acid and also make sure that the bees are near stores.

Oxalic acid

Seasons have changed quite dramatically over the last couple of decades; David now finds that the majority of his hives have brood all year round. Unfortunately oxalic acid, which is used by many UK beekeepers as a winter anti-varroa treatment, is only about 20% effective when there is brood in the hive, as the mites will all hop into the brood. David feels it's only worth doing oxalic if there's no brood in the hive, otherwise disturbing your bees isn't worth it.

This relates to my post in December, **The great Facebook oxalic acid controversy** (http://adventuresinbeeland.com/2013/12/07/the-great-facebook-oxalic-acid-controversy/). LBKA Committee member Mark Patterson was at the meeting and spoke up to say that when he checked his bees in early-mid December they were broodless, so he was able to go ahead and do the oxalic treatment. If there is brood when you check, destroying it and coming back a day or two later is an option.

Treating with oxalic acid. Courtesy The Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera), Crown Copyright.

Hefting and feeding

"How many of you heft your hives?" asked David. Many of us put our hands up, only to be told not to bother. David believes it is a meaningless exercise, as it tells you nothing about where the bees are in relation to their stores. What you want to know is, have the bees got access to food? If brood is present the bees will be extremely reluctant to leave it, even if honey stores are on the next frame. This can result in them starving to death. In this situation you could dangle rolls of fondant down between the frames (thanks Mark Patterson for this tip).

If you are in any doubt, feed! Once you start feeding candy (fondant) you have to keep feeding it because they'll put their brood nest there.

Ambrosia fondant

Water

Make sure your bees have water nearby. Water is very important for bees, even in winter, as they need it to be able to dilute their stores. David and Celia use upturned dustbin lids with stones in. Compost piles are also very good sources of moisture.

Frames

Build new frames but don't install the wax foundation until needed. Bees don't like building on old foundation. Warm up old foundation that's got cold by leaving it in a warm room or, best of all, heating it gently with a hairdryer until you smell the oils. A hairdryer will warm all the way through the wax.

Spring management – jobs to do in the spring

Comb changing

April is a good time to change comb, as by then there are new young bees in the hive. The optimum age for bees to begin wax building is around 12 days old. If the shook-swarm or Bailey exchange is done too early on, the older bees which have lasted all winter will be forced to build wax. This is like asking a group of pensioners to build their own nursing home!

David and Celia find that getting the bees to draw out new comb helps maintain a good brood pattern when the queen begins laying in it.

Nice new comb – yellow, not dark brown

Shook swarming

See FERA's 'Shook swarm' fact sheet for step-by-step instructions on how to do a shook-swarm (https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=167).

David's favourite way to change comb is the shook-swarm method (shaking the bees onto new foundation, burning the old brood frames). Colonies need to have at least five frames of bees and a laying queen. The amount of brood doesn't matter so much as the amount of adult bees. Don't do this on colonies which are on less than five frames, as they will be too weak.

It should take an average sized colony about a week and a half to draw a new brood box's worth of comb out in April. Always feed heavy 2:1 sugar to water ratio syrup after shook-swarming, even if a nectar flow is on. David finds the cost of wax and syrup are more than recovered through the subsequent strength of the colony.

Shook-swarming can be used as a great anti-varroa technique. If you take two combs of open (uncapped) brood when shook-swarming and place them in the middle of the new brood box, all the mites feeding on the adult bees will jump into the larvae to reproduce. Once the larvae has been capped, you then remove these frames before the bees and varroa hatch twelve days later! If you

forget to do this in time, congratulations you've just bred varroa.

Someone asked if doing the shook-swarm puts colonies backwards, but David finds the contrary – the sense of urgency to replace the comb really makes the bees go for it. He knows a commercial beekeeper who shook-swarms all his bees in May – it improves his honey production as the workers then don't have to worry about feeding brood.

The shook-swarm can also work well as a quick technique to unite two colonies. Pick one queen and shake the two colonies in together. Spray a little sugar water over to distract them from fighting and they should be fine.

Bailey comb change

See FERA's 'Replacing comb' fact sheet for step-by-step instructions on how to do a Bailey comb change (https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=167).

David's method of Bailey comb change uses multiple dummy boards on both side of the brood boxes to create a 'chimney' effect. The bees in the bottom brood box warm up the bees above, making it easier for them to draw new comb. Once mature brood is present in the new comb, move the queen up into the top box and put a queen excluder between the two boxes.

The Bailey change is gentle, not too drastic and preserves brood. This makes it more suitable for small colonies. If a small colony has nosema, the Bailey change will not destroy all the spores but will get the colony in a better shape to cope with the nosema. However, any pathogens on the old comb are transferred up to the new comb as the bees move about and the varroa are also preserved because the brood is left to hatch.

In both methods, ultimately the comb is discarded but the wooden frames can be reused. David and Celia use a team of 34 geese to eat up the wax from the sides of old frames – apparently they love it. They're then boiled in washing soda (the frames, not the geese).

Does the queen have space to lay?

Don't let your brood nests become clogged with stores. If there are no empty brood cells free, the queen won't have space to lay. If you have any drawn out comb you could put this in and remove a couple of frames of stores.

Thoughts on MAQs anti-varroa strips

"Anyone tried MAQs yet?" asked David. Mark P had bought some but not used it yet; no-one else had tried it.

Apparently people have reported mixed results with MAQs. The biggest issue is often loss of brood, because the formic acid will permeate through the brood cell cappings. Yes it kills varroa in the brood, but it kills brood too! In that way it's like doing a shook-swarm. It has some advantages over Apiguard as it can be used safely whilst the bees are storing honey. It will eat any metal work inside the hive and even kill grass in front of the hive!

You can find David and Celia's website at http://www.eastsurreybees.co.uk/. What do you think of his methods, would you consider using any of them?

Musings of a beekeeper

Beards, Boards and Book-Thieves

Simon Wilks

In the first years of beekeeping, when you might have a spare hive to hand, and the space to put it, the Pagden method of swarm management looks simple and achievable. It also offers an easy way to increase the number of colonies.

Later, a few of the grimmer truths about swarming become apparent. What, at first, looks like one of nature's handouts quickly becomes a problem. Neither equipment nor space is in infinite supply, and there comes a time when we, our landlords or our neighbours, will admit that enough is enough.

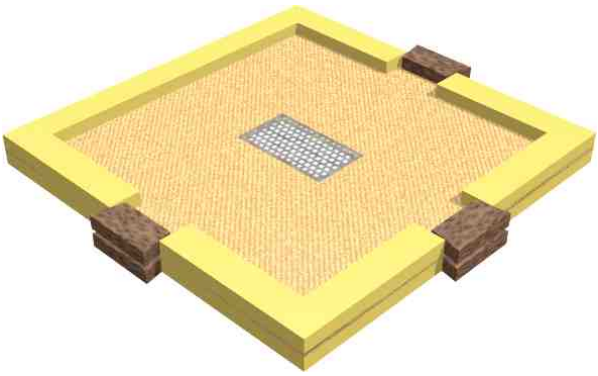
Some resort to desperate measures, and you often see beekeepers rattling feverishly through their hives on a lethal quest for queen cells, bent on expurgating each and every one on each and every frame. Others hunt down their queens and clip their wings in the hope of putting off the fateful day. And a few of our blessed number will simply buy another pallet-load of poly-nucs in the hope of flogging off their cast-offs before they become a nuisance.

But even the most extreme measures don't work for long. For a start, some colonies just love to swarm, especially those that have been raised from swarms themselves, and they're always building queen cells, even when we're not looking. And some colonies specialise in casts, pushing out streams of tiny swarmlets until they've swarmed themselves to oblivion. Either way the result is the same – our colonies get weaker and we have to run about after errant clumps, armed with sheets and cardboard boxes, wondering what we'll do if we catch them.

It's then that we start thinking less about swarm prevention, or even swarm control, and more about swarm management. And then, if we're not very careful, we'll find ourselves reading Snelgrove's book on "Swarm Management"

It is a thin enough book, but very annoying. Most editions, for a start, have a picture on the front of a man, taken in the days when smirking stunt-mongery was fashionable, wearing a straw hat and a beard of bees, as if the daily scraping of his face to a questionable approximation of pre-pubescence wasn't enough of a statement.

Inside, it's not much better. The highlight is a description of a complicated board, known as the Snelgrove board, with six baffling doors and a mesh-covered hole in the middle that looks roughly like this:



The rest is a set of prescriptive recipes, dictating the opening and closing of the doors according to a schedule unmanageable for anyone with a life. Each recipe seems identical to the last, though they're all cunningly different and have subtly different aims, and they're all impossible to remember.

But the worst thing about it is that, despite the cover, despite the bafflement and despite it being written a bit old-fashioned, it's almost impossible to keep hold of. I own two copies that, on account of my unwise kindness, are lurking on the shelves of anonymous associates who remain uncrushed by guilt.

The main idea, if memory still serves, is just like the Pagden method of swarm control. The colony is split into two (queen and foragers left where they are, brood and nurse bees somewhere else), and then, as the nurse bees grow into foragers, their box is moved so that the foragers return to the original box, keeping the numbers, and the honey yields, nicely up, while simultaneously allowing a new queen to be raised. The main difference is that, because the colony is split by a board between boxes on the stack, you don't need a spare hive or anywhere to put it. Another difference is that, because the Snelgrove board contains a mesh-covered hole, the scent of the bees throughout remains the same, making reuniting a little less risky. So, what's with the complicated timings? The answer is simply that they work best. Other timings will work, and you can use a Snelgrove board to the same schedule as you'd use with a Pagden-type artificial swarm. The honey yields might be a little less, but that's the only disadvantage.

There is still a risk that bottom box might still try to raise a queen if they've still got the urge, and, being at the bottom, it might be more difficult to inspect than if they were in a separate hive. But it's the supers, hopefully, that are heavy, not the brood, and it's really no more work at all to inspect both properly.

But why wait till they've got the urge? Why wait for queen cells to appear before doing an artificial swarm? There is an argument that the bees are better-placed to decide when they should start swarm preparations, and making part of the colony artificially queenless before they're ready might not have the best results. But all queen-rearing operations rely on that, and they've served us well enough so far. It's also the case that, much of the time, the bees are ready before we think they should be. That's worth thinking about. Admittedly, it's not as straightforward as it look, and care must be taken to avoid emergency 'scrub' queens being raised, so some further reading might be needed. But Snelgrove's book gives wise advice and, happily, there are at least two copies in circulation, which I'm sure their 'owners' would be delighted to pass along.

This year's National Honey Show

Fiona Matheson & Helen Cave (National Honey Show)

As you already know, an enthusiastic team works hard all year round to plan and bring you a bigger and better National Honey Show each year. You'll be pleased to know that the postponement of proposed building work at St Georges means the venue is available for both our 2014 **and** 2015 Shows.

As usual, for 2014 we will have lectures by world-class scientific researchers in the bee world. The provisional programme includes Dr Jamie Ellis University of Florida on the subjects of Research there, Honey Bee Biology, and their diseases and pathogens; Ann Harman, Vermont, US will talk on the topics of sugars and reducing stress on bees, and Pollination; Giles Budge on the work of the NBU; Prof Nikolaus Koeniger on honeybee diversity, and preventing re-infestation of varroa and Gudrun Koeniger on mating strategies to avoid inbreeding. Professor Stephen Martin will talk about life cycles of wasps and hornets, and Michael Badger MBE on maximising honey production in the urban environment.

The Friday BeeCraft Lectures provisional programme includes whether bees like the taste of honey by Nicola Simcock from the Institute of Neuroscience, University of Newcastle and Africanised bees by Ann Harman, Vermont, US.

Saturday lectures for those new to beekeeping, and/or just interested in the subjects will include Yearly Beekeeping Activities, and Products of the Hive for Showing.

On the subject of showing, we have two new classes this year: Class 6 for 2 jars of set honey; and Class 41 one bottle of sweet and one bottle of dry mead.

As last year, there will be lectures at 9.30am and 11am on the Thursday morning. The trade hall will open earlier, at 12 noon on Thursday. The main show opening ceremony is at 2pm, followed by exhibition of classes which opens after the judging has finished.

We want to encourage more competitive entries, and give our old hands a run for the prizes. Many of our experts are happy to both talk to newcomers at the show, and share their 'secrets' in the 'how to' workshops. We appreciate that many people are interested in how the judges arrive at their decisions. Judges have followed a long path of showing themselves, stewarding, and study to become judges and many are happy to share their knowledge and expertise. Time constraints prevent detailed comments for every entry, but two of the Gift Classes: Class 5: Two jars of liquid honey and Class 6: Two jars of set honey will have judges' feedback for every entry. Many of the judges stay at the show during Thursday afternoon, some for Friday and/or Saturday, and would be happy to answer interested enquiries about the classes they have judged. Any exhibitor is free to approach any judges who are around after judging is complete.

As ever, the National Honey Show relies on a large team of volunteers, and all offers of help are welcome. Do contact us, - you can e-mail the Show Secretary at showsec@zbee.com and he will pass your offer to the right person – if you can spare some time at the Show to help.

In 2013 we were successful in winning National Lottery funding towards the video project, and for the first time, were able to video some of the lectures, the first of which are available for all to view on YouTube. These have been expertly produced, and have been very well received, with large numbers of people viewing them. If you haven't seen them yet and would like to, the simplest way is to put 'National Honey Show YouTube Channel' into Google and you'll get there straightaway. If you don't have a computer, your local (UK) library almost certainly offers free internet access and will help you find the videos. Check out whether they provide headphones and if not, take some along as the lectures are well worth listening to.

We would like to be able to offer this expensive, luxury, but very popular service again in the future and hope to attract National Lottery funding again. However this is not a reliable or complete source of funding, so we would welcome sponsorship. In addition, we would also like to expand the National Honey Show raffle to facilitate the funding of future videos. We hope you will support this venture and – of course continue to support the National Honey Show itself.

We have a unique collection of displays, lectures and networking opportunities at the National

Honey Show, and look forward to seeing you at the Show this autumn: Thursday 30th October to Saturday 1st November 2014 once more at St Georges College, Weybridge.

Committee

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with a member of the committee if you have any questions, requests, suggestions (and offers of help!), but remember that we are all volunteers with busy lives. We are **Karin Courtman** (chair; chair@lbka.org.uk), **Jon Harris** (treasurer; treasurer@lbka.org.uk), **Angela Woods** (secretary; 0785 026 3077; admin@lbka.org.uk); **Howard Nichols** (education; education@ lbka.org.uk), **Aidan Slingsby** (members' services and web; services@lbka.org.uk and webmaster@lbka.org.uk), **David Hankins** (membership secretary; member ship@lbka.org.uk), **Richard Glassborow** (apiaries' manager; apiaries@lbka.org.uk) and **Mark Patterson** (forage officer; forage@lbka.org.uk). Our website is http://www.lbka.org.uk/.