



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

In this issue...

In news this month, we've got a honey sales opportunity, a details of a proposed microscopy course, details of our BBKA exam preparation programme for next year, small hive beetle, LBKA-forum, a reminder that we can take your entries to the National Honey Show for you and a reminder about membership renewals in time for the AGM next month.

As well as the usual newsletter features, Cerys has been reminding us what happened at last month's meeting, Corrine has been telling us about the London Honey show, Mark has been reflecting on his recent trip to the US (and will do so again at the AGM), Philippe has been reflecting on his first beekeeping year, Simon has been considering toxins in honey and Emily has been looking into unpalatable honeys.

Thanks to the many people that have contributed to this months' newsletter: Karin Courtman, Corrine Edwards, David Hankins, Cerys Harrow, Richard Glassborow, Howard Nichols, Mark Patterson, Emily Scott (via her excellent blog), Philippe Sigal and Simon Wilks.

Please contact Aidan at services@lbka.org.uk if you'd like to discuss writing an article. We hope you enjoy the newsletter.



Ken Dolbear; <http://www.sandfordheritage.org/john-wright-diary-october>

From our Chair



Karin Courtman
chair@lbka.org.uk

Welcome to the October newsletter. The weather has turned colder now so hopefully everyone has finished feeding syrup. It is good to complete all syrup

feeding before the average temperature drops below 10C as the colder it becomes, the more difficult it is for the bees to process and cap and there is a risk that any uncapped stores might ferment during the Winter. This is a problem because the alcohol can make them evacuate their bowels inside the hive.

Now is the perfect time to put the mouseguards on. If you put them on before the weather cools and the bees are still foraging a lot and collecting a lot of pollen, it can be wasted and knocked off when the bees climb through the mouseguard.

At the monthly meeting several people have been debating the benefits and types of insulation in the roof and on top of the roof to try to keep the bees warm. One person was thinking about pinning a sort of skirt around the floor to stop the worst of the icy blasts going through the open mesh floor. It is difficult to know what works best and there are many different views. My own observation is that bees that are damp seem to be the ones that do the worst over Winter. I leave the varroa inserts out except if there is an expected period of dry icy cold, when I will put them back in for a few weeks.

I enjoyed the honey tasting at the monthly meeting and I understand that it went well at the London Honey Show too. Corrine has kindly done a write up setting out the highlights for the Newsletter. We think that there are possible opportunities for members to sell honey. All opportunities will be advertised in the Newsletter so that we can maximise the number of members who benefit.

We have also had a couple of approaches from people wanting us to put bees on sites. There is a fantastic site near Greenwich that also has classroom space that we might want to use for courses and meetings. There is good parking,

but it is not really central enough to become our permanent home. We are going to explore this site further. There is also man in Wandsworth asking whether someone wants to put bees in his garden. Let me know if you are interested and have the Basic, and I will put you in touch with him.

I was also sent a link for a film <http://mosaicscience.com/story/insects-city-cant-cities-save-our-bees> that the makers were keen for LBKA members to see. Perhaps you will access the link and love it. (I found it too long!)

Next month will be our Annual General Meeting where we will elect people to committee. I hope that lots of people will be interested in standing, or being co-opted onto it. We will be sending out the formal notices soon. Mark Patterson has said he will do a talk about his visits to American beekeepers and we will have some refreshments, so I hope we will have a good turn out.

Announcements

Annual General Meeting

Our **Annual General Meeting** will be on Wednesday 12th November at Roots and Shoots. Our forage Officer Mark Patterson will give a talk about his recent trip to the US. We will also have end-of-year reports and **elections for a new committee**. Further details will be circulated to member this week, including details about the roles for election and how to stand. Please do consider standing for a role and feel free to talk to a committee member about it. **You must be a member to be eligible to vote** – make sure that you have renewed your membership by the day of the meeting.



Membership renewal reminder

If you want to continue to be in LBKA (and have your say in our AGM), don't forget to renew your membership. You will have all been sent renewal emails – if you didn't see yours contact services@lbka.org.uk we'll forward this message to you. Over 100 of you have rejoined so far - thanks for your continuing LBKA support.

Public engagement and honey selling opportunity

We have an opportunity to **promote LBKA and sell honey**. The Restaurant of Bank Nationale Paris (BNP Parisbas) London headquarters in Marylebone have offered to provide a stall at the entrance to their staff restaurant where we can offer honey tasting and sell honey. This has only just been brokered with the help of one of our members, Philippe Segal, and I am keen to see if there is interest and support to get something organised for the last week in November or possibly first week December, maybe two to three days. That is short notice I realise. All details to be worked out but **if you are interested to sell honey or could help manage the stall**, please get in touch with Richard at apiaries@lbka.org.uk.



BNP PARIBAS

Proposed LBKA Microscopy Course: Anatomy of the honey bee and pollen analysis

Howard Nichols

The LBKA proposes to run a detailed microscopy course during the winter months and needs to know if a sufficient number of members are interested for this to be viable. This is the first time this will have been attempted by our association and is likely to be 3 x 2 hour sessions organised and led by Richard Glassborow and Howard Nichols. It will concentrate on the use of microscopes for members to learn about both the pollen grain structure and the internal anatomy of the honey bee. It will be mainly hands-on practical work and over the 3 weekly sessions we expect to deal with the following:

1. Simply theory of lenses, setting up of optical instruments and a summary of terminology used.
2. Investigation and analysis of pollen grains. How to prepare a slide. Use of negative and positive stains. Internal and external structure of a pollen grain and its features.
3. Embedding and dissection of the honey bee.

Item 3 is expected to form the major part of the course with 2 full sessions covering this subject. Embedding, dissection of head, thorax and abdomen will all be separately dealt with. Did you know that a mammal is pinned on its back

for dissection but a bee needs to be pinned face downwards?

- All equipment will be supplied by the LBKA
- Numbers must be limited to a maximum of 8 people due to availability of equipment and pupil/teacher ratio.
- There is no charge. It is part of your LBKA membership subscription.
- Date to be decided but likely to be 3 evenings in January or February 2015.

Please note this course is open to all LBKA members. The only entry requirement is an interest. Although specialised in form it is for anyone interested or curious about these aspects of beekeeping. Microscopy and dissection are “niche subjects” and so equally accessible by both very new and long-standing beekeepers. It is not dependent upon length of beekeeping experience. It is truly a fascinating sub-optical world and exploration is an adventure.

Due to the organisation involved we need to have an idea of those interested so that the sessions and content can be properly planned. Please register your interest by email to education@lbka.org.uk as soon as possible. This does not require you to commit at this stage.

LBKA-Forum

All renewals and new members have received an invitation to join the private LBKA-forum Facebook group. Please use for sharing information with fellow members only. Currently, about a third of members have joined. Continue using our other Facebook group (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/2512721609/>) for discussing with a wider group of beekeepers.



Potential apiary sites

A resident in Plumstead, (SE18), is offering an enclosed back garden as a potential hive location to a beekeeper, in exchange for a few jars of honey each year. There is a similar offer from a resident in the Leytonstone area, (E11). An allotment association in the Valence Park area, (RM8), is interested in developing a relationship with an experienced beekeeper, so

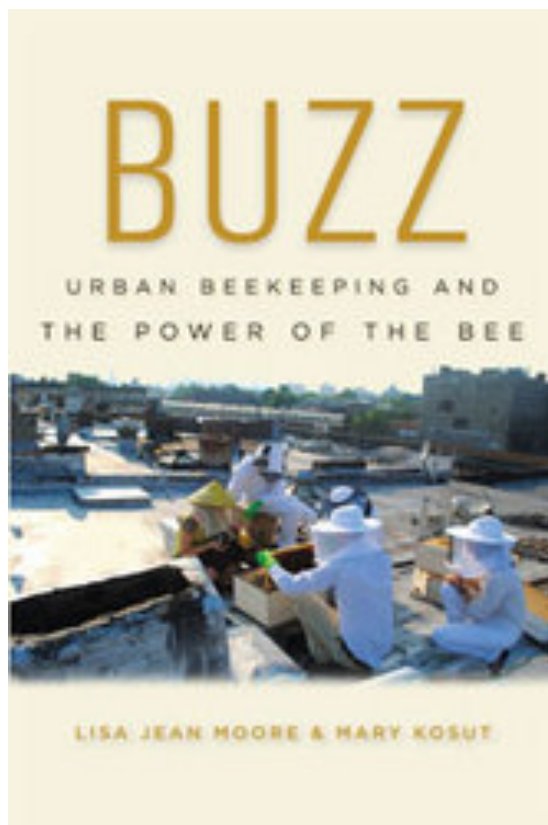
that hives can be put on the site in return for some honey and maybe some informal beekeeping mentoring. Finally, a commercial premises in the Brentford/Boston Manor Park area, (TW8), is being offered as an apiary location, with a choice of either flat roof or partly shaded grass site beside the Brent River. Contact David at membership@lbka.org.uk for details.

Honey sales

A resident in Camberwell, (SE5), is interested in purchasing local honey for her daughter who has multiple allergies. Contact David at membership@lbka.org.uk for details.

Anyone want to do a review?

Buzz: Urban Beekeeping and the Power of the Bee, by Lisa Jean Moore and Mary Kosut, was recently published by New York University Press. It is an account of urban beekeeping in New York City, and also examines the ways that bees have entered popular culture.



Would anyone like to review it?

The publishers have **offered one of our members a review copy**, in return for an honest review, which we will publish here.

See <http://www.combinedacademic.co.uk/buzz> for more details about the book and contact services@lbka.org.uk if you're interested in doing the review.

Small Hive Beetle – latest update

The latest update (4th October) from BBKA's David Aston.

The following update has been prepared by the BBKA based on communications with the UK authorities, including the National Bee Unit and the Chief Plant Health Officer in Defra, since expressing our deep concerns at the meeting of the Bee Health Advisory Forum (BHAFF) on 23 September.



Developments in Italy

The National Bee Unit is in discussion with the Italian authorities and our European partners to ensure that measures are in place to stop Small Hive Beetle (SHB) from entering the UK and harming our bee population. Following the discovery of the beetle at the port city of Gioia Tauro in south west Italy, Italian authorities established a 20km radius protection zone and a 100km surveillance zone around this initial site. Surveillance and control activities have been focused on the 20km zone and movement restrictions placed in the 100km zone preventing any export or movement of bees, bee products and equipment from the zone.

On Wednesday (01/10/14) the Italian National Reference Laboratory for Apiculture published an update on the extent of the outbreak; they report the detection of 16 infested apiaries, all within the original 20km protection zone. Infested apiaries have been destroyed and the surveillance and control measures continue.

Developments in the UK

For England and Wales, the National Bee Unit has completed the tracing of all imports of packages of bees imported from Italy, around 600 colonies, and all results have been negative for SHB.

As well as the risk of SHB entering the UK with honeybees there are other potential routes by which SHB could enter the UK.

We are particularly concerned about the importation of fruit and other plant materials from this agricultural area of Italy and have urged restriction of the trade in plants, fruit and vegetables from the SHB exclusion zone in Italy, into the UK. This has been discussed by the Plant Health authorities with Bee Health policy officials and whilst they state that they do NOT have legal powers to stop the entry of plants, fruit and vegetables from Italy under plant health legislation, we have urged them to reconsider this aspect under the terms of animal health provisions. The following actions have already been taken:

1. The Fresh Produce Consortium has been alerted of the risk of SHB entry on imported plants, fruit and vegetables from Italy and have been supplied with the NBU advisory leaflet. The Consortium has agreed to inform their members and circulate the leaflet to them.
2. The Plant Health and Seeds Inspectorate which inspects plants, fruit and vegetables at points of entry into the UK and HM Customs and Excise have been alerted and supplied with information on the risk and to how identify SHB.

Ongoing developments

The BBKA is at present not satisfied that these steps alone are adequate and wishes to see full and early consideration of the imposition of the importation of fruit, vegetables and plant material from the restriction zone. The BBKA has requested an urgent meeting with the authorities, currently scheduled for the week commencing 13 October, to further review the measures in place and to be taken. This will include how best the BBKA and its members can contribute to dealing with this contingency and a number of related issues such as the importation of honeybees into the UK. However, it is important to understand that the greatest risk of undetected entry of SHB into the UK is not likely to be with honeybees but in imported fruit, vegetables and other plant materials.

A short film

The Wellcome Trust's Mosaic magazine explores the science of life. This week they have published a short film – <http://www.mosaicscience.com/story/insects-city-can-cities-save-our-bees> – about bees and other insect pollinators, looking at the toll recent agriculture and climate changes have taken on these populations and whether cities might be the haven these insects need to survive. The film meets with scientists from the Insect

Pollinators Initiative, the UK-wide scientific collaboration, as well as renowned guerrilla gardener Richard Reynolds.



National Honey Show

The National honey show will be held at St George's College, Weybridge, Surrey, KT15 2QS between Thursday 30th October and Saturday 1st November this year.

There's still time to get your entries to one of the competitive classes to us if you'd like us you take them to the show for you, but it's now too late to register your entry. **Richard (SW12; apiaries@lbka.org.uk)** and **Mark (in W3 or E3; forage@lbka.org.uk)** have kindly offered receive entries to take.

Good luck to everyone who has entered their honey into one of the competitive classes!



Student project

Andrea Müller, a student at Central Saint Martins, contacted us. She's doing her undergraduate in Product Design and wants to do something to do with honeybees. She's interested in responses to these questions or meeting up for a chat about them. If you can help, contact her on a.m.l.muller@hotmail.com.

1. How long have this organisation existed and how did it start?
2. The number of urban beekeepers has apparently been on the rise in the last few years, have you noticed the effect of that?

3. Have you noticed any change in "business" since you started (e.g. bee numbers/honey production)?
4. An article in the Biologist argued that there are (or soon will be) too many bees in London - or rather not enough food for them, and that maybe encouraging people to become beekeepers is not the answer to their decline. What is your opinion on that?
5. Your equipment - is it home made or manufactured?
6. Is there anything in the process of handling bees where problems/annoyance occur?
7. What do you love the most about beekeeping?

Anything you find interesting that you would like to add.

Next monthly meeting

The next monthly meeting is on Sunday 9th November at Fairley House Junior School (220 Lambeth Rd, SE1 7JY) on the subject of Oxalic Acid and discussion about Small Hive Beetle. We will have oxalic acid and beetle monitoring traps for sale.

Education matters

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

2015 BBKA Basic Assessment

Both the BBKA and London Beekeepers Association **encourage members to take the BBKA basic assessment** where possible. The BBKA requirement for entry is that the applicant has been keeping bees for a minimum period of 1 year. The assessment is fairly straightforward and the syllabus can be downloaded free of charge from the BBKA website. Follow the dropdown menu for "Members" then "examinations and assessments". The cost is £15 and entry forms can also be downloaded at the same time.

London Beekeepers Association will run a revision course in the spring for members wishing to take the examination. This is likely to last for 3 evenings (2 hours per evening) in early April. The assessment is both practical and simple oral questions. It lasts about 1 hour. We cover the theory on the revision nights and, for those wanting it, also offer a practical session at an apiary beforehand.

The assessment is not difficult, is within the capabilities of anyone who has been handling bees for 12 months and who is willing to download the syllabus and undertake some background reading. We also supply free course notes in electronic format.

Any LBKA member who has been keeping bees for a minimum of 12 months and wishes to take this assessment please confirm by email to education@lbka.org.uk. We will then be able to let you have some electronic course notes to read at your leisure over the winter months. The BBKA website should be sufficient to deal with any queries regarding the assessment. Alternatively, ask another LBKA member who has taken it. Preparation for the Basic is an interesting way of continuing your beekeeping activities through the winter months. Even if you have been keeping bees for several years but not previously taken the assessment then please do seriously consider taking it in 2015. It is well worth the effort.

2015 or 2016 General Husbandry Assessment

This assessment is open to anyone who has been keeping bees for a minimum of 3 years, has passed the basic and has a minimum of 3 queenright colonies and a queenright nucleus. The BBKA entry fee is currently £40. It is a demanding and challenging assessment, largely practical, covers a wide range of tasks and takes place at the candidate's apiary. The syllabus is available for download on the BBKA website under the education section. Although demanding, it is an excellent way for the beekeeper to progress and get from where he or she is towards where he or she wishes to go.

FERA will provide funding for the training as part of its healthy bee programme but the course attendees are expected to contribute either £50 or £75 towards the cost. Training is likely to be a 2 day course in London or the Home Counties between January and May 2015 together with a ½ day practical session at an apiary. Before the course candidates are expected to familiarise themselves with the syllabus and acquire knowledge of its contents. We can supply information on this and guide attendees on reading matter. The trainer will be external to the LBKA with specific training on teaching the syllabus. Although it is hoped that attendees will take the assessment in summer 2015 or 2016 this is not a requirement to attend the course.

Arrangements will need to be made between the LBKA, BBKA, trainer and a suitable venue. These arrangements will take time and so it is

important that people wanting to take advantage of the training respond at the earliest opportunity.

Please email me at education@lbka.org.uk to register your interest.

October in the apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

Feeding syrup to the bees should have been completed by the end of September as the colony will now find it difficult to process and cap the syrup due to the colder temperature. If left uncapped then there is the risk of fermentation and dysentery over the winter months. A colony should go into winter with at least 15kgms (35lbs) of stores if possible. This will avoid the possibility of the bees dying of starvation in a cold spring.

The bees will start to cluster as temperatures fall. Clustering starts at about 18C and the cluster becomes smaller and more compact as temperatures continue to fall. They form a complete cluster at 13C. Other than this the colony will continue to operate as usual but on a much smaller scale. The queen will still be laying a few eggs, nurse bees nurturing a smaller amount of brood and bees should still be flying in the day throughout October. Bees should be foraging on Ivy, which is the last flowering plant of the year. If Apiguard was diligently applied in August and a feeding programme undertaken in September then the colony will be in optimum condition to face the next few months. This leaves the beekeeper to make final preparations for winter. The objective is to put the bees in the best position to deal with winter by trying to do small things to tip the scales in their favour.

- Check that hives are secure, straight and stable. If using a wooden floor then the colony should be slightly tilted slightly forward. Bees have evolved over millions of years to deal with cold temperatures and do this with relative ease. They cannot deal with damp and condensation. During winter they need to uncap and metabolise honey to keep warm. As a result of this, water vapour is produced. If the hive is not adequately ventilated then dampness will build up leading to fungi growth. It is essential that

the hive interior remains dry throughout the winter. This is another advantage of using an open mesh floor.

- **Mouseguards.** Once the night frosts commence then mice will look for a dark, warm place to hibernate. The smell and disturbance will upset the bees and, in more extreme instances, the colony can die out. Use of a mouseguard is extremely effective but there must be no way the mice can bypass it.
- **Gardening measures.** Check there are no branches grown up over summer and now overhanging the hive. If so then prune to remove. Also check that grass and weeds have not grown up around the hive and these will both reduce ventilation and promote damp. A quick trim with a strimmer or garden shears should be sufficient for the winter.
- **Other jobs.** Make sure that spare brood and super boxes are cleaned and put away in a cold place for the winter to deter wax moth. Placing combs in a deep freeze for 24 hours if possible kills all 4 stages of waxmoth. The bees put a lot of work and resources into making the comb. The beekeeper, as custodian over the winter months, has a duty of care to look after this valuable resource until returned to its rightful owners in the spring! Other equipment such as queen excluders, crownboards should also be cleaned and stored the same way.

October in the forage patch

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

I'm writing this months forage patch content from Washington DC in the USA. I'm here in the states for 16 days visiting beekeepers and associations in NYC, Washington and Atlanta.

One thing that is very notifiable here this year from my visit to these same 3 regions same time last year is that the flowers are much more advanced in their blooming and setting of seed. Like the UK The Eastern USA experienced an exceptional spring and the seasons are a good few weeks ahead of usual. They are not quite as far forward as we are back home though, Ivy for example has yet to bloom here.



High line

A walk along New York cities latest extension to the high line (an elevated public park situated on top of a disused railway track - see pictures) produced lots of goldenrod, echinacea, rudbeckia, coreopsis, Jerusalem artichoke, will weeds and asters all covered in Italian strain honey bees and many large Eastern bumbles bees including newly emerged queens and drones. If you ever visit New York take time out to walk the 3km linear park and download the months bloom lost from the friends of the high line website: www.highline.org.



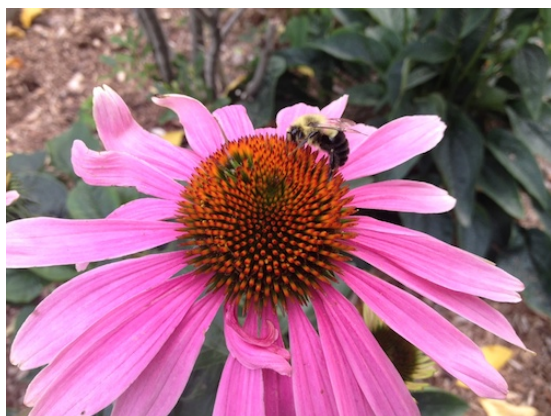
New York's sky line abuzz with bees

Whilst in NYC I met up with the chair of NYC beekeeping Jim Fischer who is less worried about lack of forage in Manhattan than we are in London mainly because there street trees are of the flowering kind unlike our horrid London planes and hive density is no where near what we have here in London. A bigger concern was swarms, irresponsible bee keeping and poor mating of queens which requires yearly imports

of queens from outside the region. Being an Island only 2 miles wide, heavily built up with sky scrapers and surrounded by the Hudson estuary creates logistical problems for congregating drones and queens finding each other. As a result of this there are very few long lived feral colonies in Manhattan and everyone buys in new queens each summer.

Here in DC things are even more advanced than NYC which is several hundred miles to the north.

Yesterday I was fortunate to spend the day with chair of DC Beekeepers alliance and state of Maryland beekeeping association Toni Burnham. Toni and I delivered a workshop together to 4th graders at Maury Elementary school. The class had been learning about pollination and plant reproduction. Toni echoed Jim's sentiments on forage here in DC. Beekeeping has only recently been legalised here so again there are not so many bee colonies in the city and the trees here offer substantial foraging opportunities.



Bombus impatiens on *Echinacea*

Back home in London I imagine the weather is turning cool, soon few flowers will be left for the bees. dahlias, cosmos, zines and many of the bees favourite annual flowers will soon keel over and turn to 'mush' when the first proper frosts strike. There is still plenty to be done in the forage patch though:

- Cut back hardy herbaceous perennials- removing the dead stems exposes the crown to the frosts eliminating pathogens and pests hiding in the materials. Less hardy plants benefit from having they dead stems left to protect them from the frosts.
- Plant crocus and other spring bulbs for flowering in March.
- Collect and compost falling leaves- the leaf mould will feed your plants when ripen.

If cutting down plant stems that are hollow why not keep some of them, tie into bundles and hang under the eaves of your garden shed or

other sheltered spot where next spring they may be used as nest sites by solitary bees.

LBKA Apiaries

Richard Glassborow
LBKA Apiary officer

Eden apiary is now mostly ready for winter. Varroa treatment is complete and colonies have plenty of honey stores,

Sadly, we have one colony that is in severe decline and probably won't make it through this winter. As is often the case it was one of our strongest this season but it is often the strongest that collapse, in this case most likely due to high varroa build up and attendant disorders. Looking back through the records this was the one colony on which we used a Bailey comb change instead of shook swarm at the beginning of the season. And strangely, we didn't have to perform an artificial swarm either, so never had the opportunity to use the varroa frame trap technique to get on top of the high levels coming out of an exceptionally warm winter last year. Lessons to be learned.

On a brighter note, we have the following report written by Gustavo Montes de Oca, from the Golden Company who are selling Eden honey at Borough market.

Young people from The Golden Co have been selling honey from the LBKA's Eden training apiary at the prestigious Borough Market. Working on The Golden Co honey stall gives young people from Hackney and East London an opportunity to learn vital work and life skills while furthering their knowledge of the honey bee.

Borough Market celebrates its 1000th anniversary this year and was a winner in this year's Slow Food Awards, making it a destination for food shoppers from around the world and an excellent setting for young people to gain exposure to many different cultures.

Visitors to the stall are generally drawn by the idea of London honey and the ethos of the social enterprise. The honey from Eden has been popular with visitors to Borough Market who are drawn to the design of the label and its slightly nutty flavour.

On the last Saturday of September, Benjamin Murray, 19, discovered that visitors to Borough Market responded much better to a vendor who knows his product. So he watched as The Golden Co director spoke of different flowers, fructose/glucose balance and the benefits of buying from producers rather than

supermarkets. Benjamin then went on to close many sales throughout the day.

Money raised through sales of honey goes towards paying the young person's wages and when there is any left after that, contributes to the running costs of The Golden Co. Earlier this year 27 young people went through The Golden Co's summer business and beekeeping programme. The aim of the programme is to improve wellbeing and employability through business and nature.

If you would like to contribute to this project with your honey please get in touch with gustavo@thegolden.co.

Thank you Gustavo, the LBKA is delighted to be involved with your enterprise.



What happened at September's Monthly Meeting

Cerys Harrow
Member

September's meeting was all about successful overwintering. A late burst of summer weather had meant that some bees were still busy, but it was time to turn our minds to the winter ahead. There were still quite a few jobs to be done before beekeepers could finally put their feet up for a few months and sit back in front of the fire to enjoy toasted crumpets spread with honey.

Very high varroa counts recently meant that it was even more important than usual to make sure bees had been treated to give them the best chance of making it through the winter. There was discussion of the best treatments to prevent wax moth infestation in frames put away to store - freezing kills all stages of the moth but not many of us have freezers big enough so various chemical methods were demonstrated.

Feeding is of course crucial as food sources become limited and feeding a thick sugar solution in the early autumn also stimulates the queen to lay well to produce plenty of winter bees.

We were also reminded of the various small adjustments that need to be made to the hive - such as checking for good ventilation, installing a mouse guard, removing the queen excluder if a super was still in place with honey supplies so that the colony could cluster near its food source.

Finally a reminder to keep the blow torch handy to scorch and sterilise any hive parts that were being removed for storage.

Before we finished there was advance notice of honey tasting next month - everyone to bring along a jar of their honey to compare and contrast. Also a reminder that the AGM will soon be upon us and all offers of help on the committee will be gratefully received.

As ever, conversation continued over tea (or coffee) and biscuits - a chance for informal chat and exchange of ideas that is perhaps one of the most important parts of the meeting.

My first year

Philippe Sigal
Member

One year and a half have already gone by and it feels like I started the mentoring program of the LBKA only yesterday. What an emotional roller coaster it has been, from the introduction to owning my own hive in my back garden!

The day I took my first trip into the apiary was one of the days that stand out the most to me, although the whole program was full of memorable moments. That day, I was supposed to meet my mentor and all the other mentees in the apiary at 11:00 and was there, (for once!) a bit in advance. As I came closer to the bees' enclosure, there were insects buzzing frantically everywhere. Scouts were whizzing past us at breakneck speeds, before veering back sharply towards an outdoor post where a huge number of bees were crowded. We stood there, mouths hanging open and when Richard, our mentor came in, he evaluated the situation quickly and efficiently, simply stating "we have a swarm on our hands and need to deal with it".

Because bees are quite fond of dark places and tend to take refuge in them, we ended up precariously balancing a carton box on top of the outdoor post. The swarm, well, swarmed in the box, and while they were otherwise

occupied in settling in the box, we quickly worked to set up a new hive to harbor them more permanently. Then, at the end of the session, wherein we carried out the standard inspections of four other hives, and performed an artificial swarm on yet another one, we removed the carton box, and the bees quite obediently made themselves at home in the newly provided hive.

Or so we thought... A few days later, they had abandoned the hive we had so graciously provided for them! If you transfer a swarm into a new hive, it is probably good to put a queen excluder at the bottom of the hive, just to give the bees some time to settle in. As Richard explained, "the bees do not read the same books we do" and you can never expect them to behave the way they should. All in all, be prepared for some surprises if you walk the path of the beekeeper.

I have been learning about bee keeping for one and a half year now and, while I would like to say that I know a lot more about these little critters now than I did back then, I must humbly admit that there are still hundreds of questions that I can't answer, or situations that I have problems handling.

Nonetheless, looking back, I remember good times, (and more rarely, not-so-good times) as I learned about bees. They're awe-inspiring, though, and the wonder and the joy I feel in knowing that I'm helping these incredibly complex creatures makes it all worth it.

Bees aren't that well understood: in fact, we've barely scratched the surface of what they can do, and the reasons behind their behavior. In essence, what makes them tick is still much of a mystery and I think that's what's most exciting: bees are essentially unknown territory, even though they have been domesticated some 4 500 years ago, by the Egyptians!

They are intelligent in a way not many people know about: we see a bee and we think "it's just a dumb insect that makes honey and stings people". While this is certainly true and being stung on the scalp really hurts, we don't reflect on their movement and pheromone based communications, or the complex inner-workings of a bee hive, or even their powerful sense of smell ... Did you know that police officers are now considering using bees to detect drugs in airports? It's true! Bees can be trained in a couple of hours to do what sniffer dogs take weeks to even attempt.

Of course, bees are still animals: they can react in often-unpredictable ways, like the anecdote illustrated. That's why when taking care of bees, you should never rush and you should always be prepared. Think ahead, do careful planning.

You should act quickly, efficiently, with a clear goal in mind. It might sound daunting, but the concepts are actually not that hard to grasp. Besides, with the mentoring program, you'll be assigned a senior beekeeper, who'll help you along and give you tips. In essence, he'll be your teacher in the ways of managing your bee colony: you'll learn how to set up a calm atmosphere to make the bees docile and sedate. Or, you may learn how to avoid disturbing their day-to-day lives and provoking them. You'll study the inner life of a colony, the complex relationships between queen and workers, the dangerous flight of the young queens and other fascinating stories.

Then, when you have your own hive, you can experience the soothing hum of an active bee hive in the drowsy summer heat, and watch the bees go on their lives without a care in the world. For the gourmets out there, a hive means having a nice, steady income of that golden, rich and tasty honey. As for the gardeners, the beneficial impact bees have on gardens is undeniable. Finally, anyone with a hive will have the rewarding thought that they are helping a species that is facing a serious threat of extinction.

The London Honey Show

Corrine Edwards
Member

The London Honey Show was held on Monday evening 6th Oct at Lancaster London.

The highlights of the evening were the speakers. **Dave Coulson** is founder of The Bumblebee Conservation Trust with about 800 members, author of "Bumblebees; their Behaviour, Ecology and Conservation", and "A Sting in the Tale". **Hattie Ellis** spoke about her "100 pots of Honey from around the world" and her book "Spoonfuls of Honey", a guide to Honey with 80 recipes. I recommend her beautiful book "Sweetness and Light". **Judy Earl** is Chair of Harrow beekeepers Association whose membership is full of lovely, helpful and honest beekeepers. Judy spoke about utilising products of the Hive and was the first holder of The Jill Foster Memorial Trophy for the display class of hive products at The National Honey Show.

Judging by the response from the Audience, the speakers were well received.

I didn't actually hear any on the talks as I was behind my stand talking to members of the public and potential beekeepers.



I met two local (to me) residents who had been on a taster course with Bee Urban. I suggested they also join LBKA for other talks, and attend the National Honey Show. Good to see some enthusiastic locals there. People bought my Honey Bee inspired jewellery, including the New Hexagon Range, a reminder for the wearer to be aware of planting Forage for Bees and Pollinators.

The competition winners.

Winner of Best Home Honey: Adrian Braimer-Jones (honey from hives kept in your garden, allotment or own residential space)

Winner of Best Rooftop Honey: Helen Rogers

Best honey from hives kept at a business or educational site: Mansion House - David Lockie and Paula Carvell

Best Packaging: Julie Hogarth

Battle of the Regions (North vs. South): Nikki Vane (hives located in South London) - Jar Number 45. This was a public taste test and vote with plenty of enthusiastic tasters.

Winner of the title Beekeeper of the year: Maddie Appleton, very much involved in the bee keeping community especially in the Holborn Area. She runs a training programme for children and young people at Hounslow Action for Youth teaching youngsters on a local allotment.

Stall holders

Beeinspired Natural Beeswax creams is always popular. Nice Candles, Soap and Tea towels. Alison Derrick has a stylish presentation.

Lucenarium. Not for profit enterprise providing provides meaningful occupation and work opportunities to people with learning disabilities, and other marginalised groups. With one of the best label designs, I like them anyway.

Bee Urban. Barnaby and crew, (based in The keepers Lodge in Kennington Park Se11) were showing a range of products with handouts and information. Did you hear them on BBC Radio 4's Food programme?

Bees and the City

Lush. Not sure why a high street shop was there, but smelt nice. Managed not to buy delicious soap.

Cavarra. Jewellery, a bright eclectic mix of things old and new. Where City meets the Surfer.

Hiver Beer. Hannah always seems happy to deal with the general public, no matter how inane the questions. Well done for that Hannah.

HS French Flint Honey. Jars, containers and bottles (70% of their glass bottles and jars are made in the U.K). They offer LBKA members a discount (ask for the code)

Bee and Tea is a British design Company. Tea Towels, Aprons and Bags. Bone China mugs with botanical illustrations by Bridget Chetwynd.

Gold & Black. Dorset based company beautifully crafted Beeswax candles in excellent packaging.

Corrine Edwards. Bee inspired jewellery. 'Grow more Forage'. I will be selling my Bee jewellery, and ceramics in the National Honey Show Trade hall (near Thornes).

Bees For Development (this years charity) raised £125 from door admissions. Visitor numbers seemed to be up, and there were several children.

Hallfield School (local primary) produced some clever and charming Bee Artworks. Well done all.



The only thing missing was the LBKA presence, no committee members, elected or otherwise.

And more importantly The Tombola. This was very popular and last year I even donated some earrings to Bees Abroad.

I would very much like to see London Beekeepers selling their London Honey next year. Do apply next year to sell Bee related goods, services, art, comestibles and HONEY.

With many thanks to Jo Hemesley and her helpful staff who looked after everyone, supplied delicious food and beverages.

The link for the show website is:
<http://www.londonbees.com/>

Musings of a Beekeeper: Is Honey Good for Bees?

Simon Wilks
Member

Not all flowers give up their nectar graciously. Some of them include doses of poisons. Nicotine and caffeine, for example, are both insecticides, but can be found in the nectar of some plants. Thymol is another example. Most are not very toxic to bees, on the whole, but they do have toxic effects and, in high doses, can be lethal.

At first glance, it's difficult to see why an insect-pollinated plant would put an insecticide in the nectar, but it seems that bees and other pollinators are attracted to nectar with small doses of nicotine or caffeine in them [1,2]. However, although they make more visits, they help themselves to less nectar than usual [3]. If a plant can increase the number of pollinator visits, without having to pay the full price in nectar, why wouldn't it? Especially if the toxins also deter 'nectar thieves', such as ants, which just take the nectar but do no pollination.

From the plant's point of view, that's great news. It's not such good news for the pollinators, though, who have to deal with the toxin. Happily, pollinators have mechanisms for dealing with toxins.

Honeybees deal with toxins, at least in part, by breaking them down using a bunch of proteins called P450s. They're naturally in the bees, but they increase production in the presence of certain chemicals found in pollen, propolis or honey. The one that seems to have the greatest effect is one called p-coumaric acid, which is mostly found in pollen [4], though some things in propolis have a similar effect.

This is neat, because it looks like the plants are making good for their toxic trickery by helping pollinators cope with the poisons while nectar-thieves, the naughty insects that take the nectar and don't bother with the pollen, don't get the benefit.

The toxins in nectar (and honey) aren't the only toxins in the hive. Fungi also live in the hive, and some of them produce toxins of their own [5] which bees are able to fight off better if their food has propolis in it. Other toxins, introduced by beekeepers, also exist. As well as thymol (in Apiguard, for example), there's tau-fluvalinate (the active ingredient in Apistan) and flumethrin (ditto for Bayvarol), which are used

to kill varroa mites. Strangely, although these pyrethroids are toxic to insects in general, honeybees seem able to tolerate them at relatively high doses, thanks to their specific bunch of P450s [6,7].

This is all very interesting, and highlights the complexity, and importance, of just one of the many immune-system and detoxification mechanisms that living things rely on. But what can we do, if anything, with this information? Should we take care to leave propolis in the hive? Should we make sure the bees are fed honey after varroa treatment? Should we feed pollen along with the candy in winter, or would that risk encouraging the bees to make more brood than is wise for the weather?

I don't know, but it's food for thought.

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Adventures in Beeland: floral sources of unpalatable honey

Emily Scott's revision notes for the BBKA's Module 2 exam "Honeybee products and forage" that she's taking in November, from excellent blog: <http://adventuresinbeeland.com/blog>.

Unpalatable honey sources

The nectar of a few flowers produces honey which is unpleasant to taste, while a even smaller number of nectars are poisonous to bees or to humans when condensed into honey.

Commonest unpalatable honeys in the UK

Privet – bitter taste

Celia Davis says of privet "it is very unlikely to be a problem as only very rarely are bees likely to collect large quantities of its nectar. Even so, a fairly small amount can damage the flavour of other nectars mixed with it."

The Collins Beekeeper's Bible comments that privet honey is "very strong flavoured, making it objectionable and unpalatable unless it is blended with lighter honeys." It flowers during May to June.



Privet – © RHS 2002

Common Ragwort – bitter taste

A bright, long-flowering plant which is very popular with bees. It's tough and can grow in waste land, road sides, rough areas of parks etc.

Celia Davis describes ragwort as being "very attractive to bees... likely to produce quantities of extractable honey which smells horrible when it is fresh. If it is allowed to stand and granulate, the flavour improves and some beekeepers use it to blend with other, less flavoursome honeys. The plant contains several pyrrolizidine alkaloids which are responsible for the deaths of quite a few horses each year." Ragwort honey is not thought to be dangerous to humans, as it seems likely that someone would have to eat a huge amount of honey to do themselves any harm.

Ted Hooper concurs, saying of ragwort honey "it is bright yellow and has so offensive an odour that when first extracted it is completely unpalatable. Once granulated however, the smell is lost and the honey quite good."

Clive de Bruyn is also positive about ragwort honey, commenting in his classic book Practical beekeeping (1997) "The honey is a deep yellow with a strong flavour thought by some to be obnoxious. I personally find that it adds a bit of interest." He goes on to say "Concern has been raised over the possibility of the honey containing pyrrolizidine alkaloids (PAs). A recent MAFF survey to assess levels of PAs in UK honey produced by bees with access to ragwort stated that there was no cause for alarm." MAFF being the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, now known as DEFRA.



Honeybee on ragwort

Unpleasant to some

Ivy – bitter taste

From the point of view of bees ivy must be a wonderful plant, flowering in September to October when little other forage is about.

However, some people find ivy honey far too bitter. Here's a description of ivy honey from Cornwall by Elizabeth Gowing in her wee masterpiece, "The Little Book of Honey":

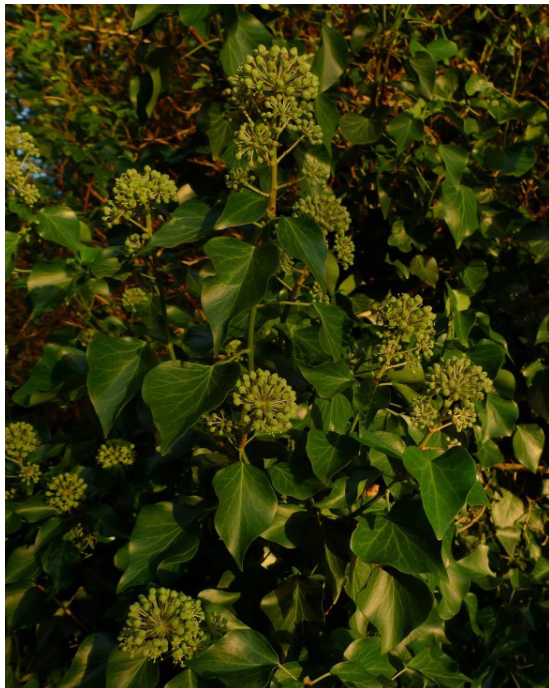
The aroma is surprisingly flowery and light, but the taste is certainly not. It's not a very sweet honey, and there is a bitter kick in it which hits you as the crystallised paste melts in your mouth.

I tried to place the flavour and then I got it – if a pointy-chinned woman got out her wand and turned a Stilton into a honey, this is what it would taste like.

And is that a good thing? I'm not convinced."

To read more about Elizabeth's bitter experiences with ivy honey, see her post Ivy honey from the Lizard Peninsula.

Yet others, myself included, prefer a honey that isn't super-sweet and has more character. There are beekeepers with customers who specially request ivy honey. As I've got older my tastebuds have changed a bit and I've come to appreciate more sour and bitter foods such as olives, grapefruit juice and even gherkins, which used to make me wince.



Ivy flowers

Honeys which are poisonous to humans

Many of the plants in the Ericaceae family, such as Rhododendron, Pieris, Agarista and Kalmia, produce poisonous nectars which contain grayanotoxins.

Rhododendron spp

Rhododendrons are widely grown in the UK (they originally came from East Asia) but I haven't heard of any reported cases of people here being affected by the honey; Celia Davis suggests this is because honey bees are not very interested in their flowers.

Cases of poisoning from this "mad honey" have been reported in Turkey and America though. It's said that ancient Greeks and Romans used to leave rhododendron honey in the path of invading armies. The soldiers would eat the sweet treat and end up vomiting and dizzy from grayanotoxin, a toxin contained in the honey. The effects rarely prove fatal but probably would have halted or slowed down the army for a couple of days.

The Collins Beekeeper's Bible contains a tale of mad honey poisoning from the British botanist, plant-hunter and explorer Frank Kingdon-Ward. His memoir Plant-hunter's Paradise (1937) vividly describes his experiences with rhododendron honey in northern Burma, near Tibet. The effect on the honey on him and his companions was a delirium similar to acute alcohol poisoning. Strangely the local Tibetans seemed to eat it without ill effects – or perhaps they just ate less than the greedy Europeans?

Ted Hooper mentions a case of bee deaths in the Isle of Colonsay in 1955 – the island was planted with a large number of Rhododendron thomsonii which subsequently poisoned whole colonies.

See more

Grayanotoxin Poisoning: 'Mad Honey Disease' and Beyond

A scientific paper on mad honey. Contains a fascinating description from the Greek warrior-writer Xenophon in 401 BC on the effects of the honey on an army – "those who had eaten a great deal seemed like crazy, or even, in some cases, dying men"

A rare case of "honey intoxication" in Seattle

Rusty at Honey Bee Suite reports on the case of a man poisoned by honey purchased at a local

farmer's market. Like Celia Davis, Rusty's observations have led her to believe "that rhododendron is not a preferred forage for honey bees and they probably collect it only in rare circumstances when other more favorable blooms are not available."

"Mad Honey" sex is a bad idea

That got your attention!

Hallucinogen Honey Hunters documentary

Added after P&B mentioned it in the comments below - thanks! A tribe in Nepal hunt wild rhododendron honey with natural psychoactive properties. One falls unconscious after overdosing on the honey.

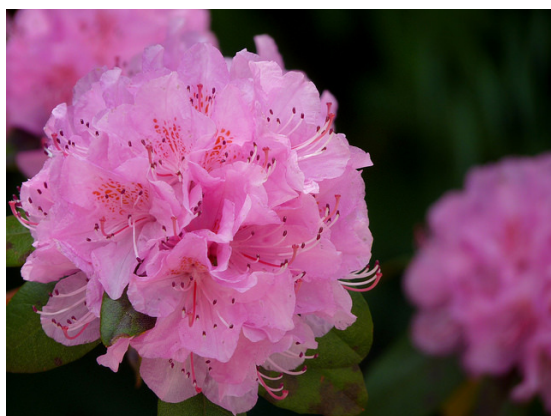


Photo of rhododendron by Dendroica cerulean

Kalmia latifolia

Commonly called mountain-laurel. This grows in the UK, but not in large enough quantities to cause problems. It is native to the eastern U.S.

According to Wikipedia's entry on *Kalmia latifolia*, "The green parts of the plant, flowers, twigs, and pollen are all toxic, including food products made from them, such as toxic honey that may produce neurotoxic and gastrointestinal symptoms in humans eating more than a modest amount. Fortunately the honey is sufficiently bitter to discourage most people from eating it, whereas it does not harm bees sufficiently to prevent its use as winter bee fodder. Symptoms of toxicity begin to appear about 6 hours following ingestion. Symptoms include irregular or difficulty breathing, anorexia, repeated swallowing, profuse salivation, watering of the eyes and nose, cardiac distress, incoordination, depression, vomiting, frequent defecation, weakness, convulsions, paralysis, coma and eventually death."

So please don't go trying it.



Kalmia latifolia, the beautiful but deadly mountain laurel ©RHS

Nectars which are poisonous to bees?

Silver lime

Silver pendant lime, also known as weeping lime

Some loopy plants make themselves poisonous to their own pollinators - or do they?

There has been some disagreement about whether lime trees poison bumble-bees, or bumble-bees run out of energy whilst feeding on them and die.

In 1997 Clive de Bruyn observed that "The culprits are mainly the late flowering species during dry weather when the nectar is concentrated... Such poisoning is not common and is dependent on the season, district and species of lime. One species that is known to affect bees is the pendant silver lime *Tilia petolaris*, a beautiful tree, symmetrical with a rounded top. It can grow to 24m (80ft). Bees appear to get drunk on the nectar, and bumble bees are especially prone. They can sometimes be found dead under the trees in great numbers."

However, more recent research seems to indicate that the cause of bumbles being found dead under lime trees is their foraging behaviour, rather than toxic nectar. Science

writer Philip Strange has left some very useful comments below, including this link on lime trees on the Bumblebee Conservation Trust's website: Finding dead bees.

As Philip sums up below, "It seems they continue feeding on lime nectar even when levels are low and so they run out of energy. Honeybees don't do this, they look elsewhere before they exhaust themselves." Angela Woods of the London Beekeepers Association also left me a plausible comment on a Facebook discussion I started - "Perhaps it is because bumbles have less stores in their nests and this tree tends to flower in the 'gap' when other sources of nectar are scarce ... I was called out last summer to a street in Holland Park lined with silver limes and there were tons of poor bumbles dead under each tree. It was depressing to see."

Have you had any experiences of toxic or unpleasant honey, or found bees dead by any of these plants? If so I would be interested to hear about it.

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Upcoming events

Thursday 30th October to Saturday 1st November: National Honey Show

at St George's College, Weybridge, Surrey KT15 2QS.

Promoting the highest quality honey and wax products with international classes, beekeeping lecture convention and workshops. More details at the National Honey Show website.

Sunday 9th November: Monthly meeting: Oxalic acid

11:00-12:00 at Fairley House Junior School, 220 Lambeth Rd, London SE1 7JY

Use of oxalic acid plus other topics. Followed by chat with coffee and biscuits. Members only - non-members who'd like to find out more about LBKA can email us.

Wednesday 12th November: Annual General Meeting and elections

1830 at Roots and Shoots, Walnut Tree Walk, London, SE11 6DN

Our Annual General Meeting will include a talk by Mark Patterson about his recent beekeeping trip to the US, reports of LBKA activities over the past year and the election of a new committee. All welcome, but only members are eligible to vote. Membership runs until end of September, so don't forget to renew your membership if you haven't already done so.

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), **David Hankins** (secretary and membership secretary; admin@lbka.org.uk and membership@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), **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/>.**