The London Beekeepers' Association
LBKA News

June, 2018

Welcome to the June Newsletter! As well as the regular content that we look forward to every month (thanks to the authors of regular articles), we have an article on intolerance to bee stings (p10), an article by someone who did the BBKA Basic Assessment (p10) and an article on the lifecycle of the Asian Hornet (p13). Also a warning about the European Foul Brood outbreaks in London on page 3. And one of the most detailed write-ups of last month's monthly meeting (p4).

Thanks to this month's contributors: **Adam Armstrong, Natalie Cotton, Jonathan Dale, Richard Glassborow, Petros Hahladakis, Geoff Hood, Martin Hudson, Howard Nichols, Mark Patterson and Vlad Zamfir**. Thanks as usual to **Martin Hudson** for proof-reading it.

Would you like to join the esteemed list of contributors above? If so, please contact me.

Happy beekeeping.

Aidan Slingsby, Editor, services@lbka.org.uk

From our Chair

Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk

I am taking a short holiday and am in a relaxed and reflective mood.

This little solitary bee, sorry, I can't identify it, has finished foraging for the day and has curled up inside a flower of wild Pelargonium. Mark Patterson tells me it is not uncommon for male solitary bees to shelter in flowers for the night, particularly bell flowers. There were in fact quite a few in the flowers of this particular plant when I took this photograph in the garden of a friend's house where I am staying in south-western France.

I have seen wild bees similar to this in my garden at home in London but I have never noticed this behaviour before. Maybe it is specific to species we do not have in the UK – there are apparently about 1,000 species of bee in France against the 280ish in the UK. As far as I am aware, I have probably seen less than 10 anywhere but I don't really know – I simply do not have enough knowledge even to say what I have or haven't seen. But my curiosity is aroused, I am learning and, as is usually the case, the more we find out about anything the more

Solitary bee, curled up inside a wild Pelargonium flower. Photograph by Richard Glassborow.

interesting it becomes and our sense of wonder and awe and pleasure grows.

For me, this particular journey began with beekeeping. As beekeepers, we inevitably spend a lot of time observing honey bees and I think most of us would agree that this glimpse into another world is part of the fascination. It feels like a privilege. It is a privilege and our relationship with honey bees goes back thousands of years.

Arguably, on the grand scale, we have abused this relationship. In return for honey and pollination services we have given them what? If we were honest we have to recognise that it is our commercial practices that have lead to the introduction and spread of pests and diseases like varroa. And some of these pests and diseases don't stop with honey bees: they are getting into the truly wild bee populations as well. It is a familiar story of the presumably unintended consequences of the exploitative side of human behaviour but it is not the story I want to follow here.

I want to return to the journey form beekeeping to appreciation of the natural world. And there is a connection here for the LBKA.

As you may be aware, we are in the process of developing visits to schools as part of the 'better public understanding of bees' side of what we do. We are working with the charity, School Food Matters (SFM) who have secured funding for us to deliver a pilot programme of visits to London schools. Six schools have been selected from the 51 that responded to an invitation to express interest. And we have had a very positive response from our membership when we asked for volunteers to help deliver this programme.

What is the connection? I understand it is projected that by 2050 nearly 70% of the world's human population will be living in an urban environment. That is potentially a frightening disconnect with the natural world. In that context, does beekeeping have a new role to play? Whilst urban beekeepers may not be part of the mainstream food chain we can share our interest and our window into it, to engender curiosity and respect for the natural world. Whilst we understand not all our members can help deliver this, we hope there is wide support.

Announcements

This is our official place for announcements. If you only read one section of the newsletter, it should be this one!

Walworth Garden, the venue for June's Bee Health Day

June Monthly Meeting: Bee Health Day

Our next Monthly meeting will Bee Health Day on **Sunday 10th June**. This will a very different monthly meeting than usual. Firstly, we will run two (identical) sessions – one in the morning and one in the afternoon. Secondly, we are limiting numbers to each at 20 and require members to register in advance. Finally, we **not** be at our usual venue, but instead will be at Walworth Garden (206 Manor Pl, Braganza St, SE17 3BN).

Bee Health day is important because all beekeepers need to know about bee diseases and pests. This includes how to to recognise whether something's wrong and how reduce the risk and impact of pests and diseases. This session will be run experienced beekeepers Richard, Geoff, Karin and Tristram, along with help from others.

Make sure you sign up – there's still plenty of room – and we look forward to seeing you then.

Next month's meeting will be on **Sunday 8th July** on the subject of **honey treatment, properties and extraction** at the usual venue of Fairley House Junior School, 220 Lambeth Rd, London SE1 7JY.

Monthly Tuesday Social: Natalie's pub pick

Our next Tuesday Social will be on **Tuesday, 26th June** at **The Gladstone** (64 Lant St, London SE1 1QN, UK). We will book an area for us.

Natalie reports that this is a real community pub and (perhaps) the only pub in London run by a family of Indian descent. They have an excellent pie and a pint for £9.99 offer – and it's a curry pie – what's not to like?

Monthly Tuesday Socials will be held in a different (food serving) pub each month. Any suggestions should be emailed to admin@lbka.org.uk.

Please take part in the COLOSS survey

COLOSS is a Europe-wide research effort to try and understand honey bee losses. LBKA supports this initiative and ask members to consider filling out the survey.

There is a summary of the results so far. One of the things it shows is that we need more data for England.

European Foul Brood and help with quarantining swarms

Please be aware there are active foul brood notifications sent/being sent out by the NBU because there is European Foul Brood (EFB) at a number of London locations this spring. Many registered Keepers will have received these notifications from beebase if within 3km radius of an outbreak.

We recommend beekeepers exercise particular vigilance when inspecting hives and refresh their memories of what to look for by visiting BeeBase.

If collecting swarms from these areas (SW4, SW8, SW9, SE4, SE15, SE23, SE22, SW2, SE21, SE24, N17, N22) they should be quarantined, hived onto undrawn foundation not drawn comb, not fed syrup initially (they need to use their stomach contents to draw comb thus using up any contaminated honey they are carrying). Ideally hive and shut them in for a couple of days to let them draw comb and use up their stomach contents.

More detail than this cannot be provided at this point. Please do not leave swarms from these areas uncollected, they need collecting rather than being allowed to go feral but they do need quarantining/TLC.

Taking swarms to quarantine apiaries is how to do it by the book but the logistics of time and space are quite a challenge on the scale and geographical spread of London.

Our WhatsApp Swarm Collection Group is probably the antithesis from a disease control point of view but it is so effective and efficient from a swarm collection point of view and for training new collectors.

But given the number of disease alerts, coming at a time when bees are swarming, it would be prudent to have places and people who can quarantine suspect swarms.

So this is a call for members to find odd corners (especially in alert areas) that are accessible but secure (they don't have to be pretty) that might be usable as a temporary resting place (2-3 months) for a few nucleus hives. We also need keepers able to provide TLC. If you think you might be able to help please contact admin@lbka.org.uk.

Want to sell to other members?

If – as a private individual – you have a beekeeping-related product or service that you wish to tell other members about, we can help you do this in (either or both of) two ways:

- Ask services@lbka.org.uk to add it to the members' marketplace section of the newsletter (p 14).
- Through LBKA-forum, the members' only Facebook page.

Examples of things you could offer are: second-hand equipment, bees or honey. LBKA will not be involved in any other way – any transactions will be member-member. We hope this is a useful service for members.

Asian Hornet

Be vigilant in looking out for the Asian Hornet. See Geoff's article on page 13, the article on the BBKA webpage for more information and a handy leaflet that we've reproduced on page 7.

Wax wanted

Fiona Pearce-Burrows is looking to purchase wax for use in making beeswax wraps. Please contact fiona@fionapearceburrows.com.

Monthly cake

We try to have homemade cake at our monthly meetings. If you would like to bake a cake for an LBKA a monthly meeting, please let Aidan know on services@lbka.org.uk. Of course, you're welcome to bring along cake on a whim. But it makes sense to also coordinate a bit so that there's at least some cake every month!

Old announcements from May

Check our previous newsletters or contact services@lbka.org.uk for more details.

New teaching apiary in North London? If you're interested in managing the apiary there, please e-mail apiaries@lbka.org.uk.

Old announcements from April

Richard Tinkler. We're sad to report the passing of Richard Tinkler.

Nucs and swarms. To be added to here or to be added to the swarms WhatsApp group, email services@lbka.org.uk.

Sow your wild flower mixes. Now is the time to start sowing any wildflower seed mixtures you might have, for a good display of flowers for the rest of the year. We have some suggested suppliers on our website.

Possible Central London apiary opportunity. If you're interested, email resources@lbka.org.uk.

Old announcements from March

Development Update: Simon Saville updated us with LBKA's input to consultation on the Mayor's New London Plan.

BBKA's "Positive Thinking" Newsletter: World Bee Day on 20th May, two new BBKA shows (Chatsworth and Blenheim Palace, International Meeting of Young Beekeepers (IMYB) near Bordeaux, and some suggested text to write to our councillors to push for more forage creation.

Annetta Pedretti: We are sad to report the passing of Annetta Pedretti

Wax supplies wanted: Fiona is looking for beeswax. Members should contact her by email if they can help: envelopdesigns@gmail.com.

Citizen science Bee research project: see https://goo.gl/forms/w4AUJHwZnTpwQHNe2.

Build your own nuc box: Contact elliot.hodges@lbka.org.uk for further information.

Old announcements from February

BBKA swarm list: Contact Aidan (services@lbka.org.uk) if you'd like to be on BBKA's swarm list this year, confirming the postcode and phone number you'd like to be listed. These will be listed on a public page (currently "under construction"). This is an important public service that beekeepers can provide, but may result in many phone calls.

LBKA Swarms WhatsApp group: Internally, we coordinate swarm collection through a WhatsApp group. You should join this group if you're a swarm collector, want to learn to be a swarm collector or want a swarm. Contact Aidan on services@lbka.org.uk or Vlad on apiaries@lbka.org.uk.

Do you have any announcements?

If you've any announcements for the next issue of LBKA News, please send to Aidan at services@lbka.org.uk.

Last month's Monthly Meeting: Small Hive Beetle

Martin Hudson describes the June Monthly Meeting session led by Geoff Hood supported by Mark Patterson, on one of two potential nasties for our bees in the pipeline. Small Hive Beetle is one of two imminent invasive potential threats to honey bees.

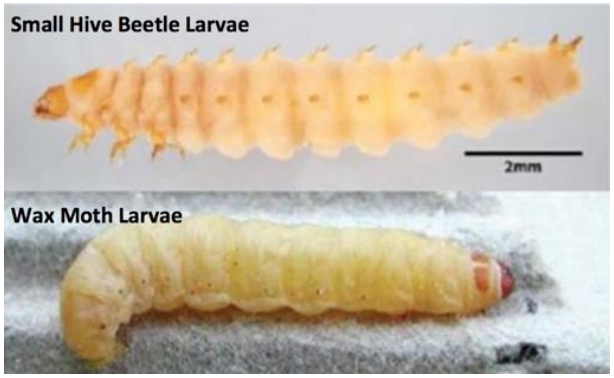
Martin Hudson
LBKA member

Geoff Hood introduced us to the Small Hive Beetle (SHB) at another well-attended LBKA Monthly meeting in May, with a slide show giving details of this non-native pest to honey bees. SHB is native to sub-Saharan Africa, was found in the US in 1996, but was discovered in southern Italy in 2014. Like the asian hornet, its arrival in the UK is, unfortunately, inevitable. We will then have to have effective defences against it – as with the varroa mite – and we ain't seen nothing yet!

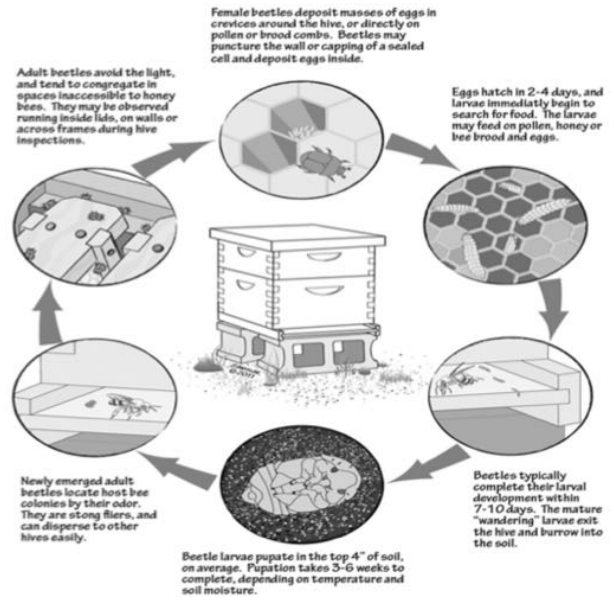
SHB is one of four statutorily notifiable diseases/pests, so occurrences must be notified to the National Bee Unit and the Bee Inspectors. The adult is a third of the size of a worker bee (about 11mm long), and is distinctive with clubbed antennae and short wing covers. The larvae look similar to young wax moth larvae, but have spines on their back and a distinct 'head'. They do not spin silk, and pupate in burrows in the earth outside the hive. Adult females can lay 2000 eggs in dark crevices in the hive, which hatch in 2/3 days, and in infested hives adults will be seen scurrying into dark corners. They can live for up to six months.

The larvae eat pollen and honey, as well as young bee larvae, and make a horrid slimy mess – an infested hive is said to be "slimed"! Supers stored 'wet' can also get infested, and the larva's tunnelling and defecating

. *Source: Mark Hood (2011), with permission.*



Comparison of SHB and wax moth larvae. SHB larvae have spines, a beetle-like head, many more larvea, do not spin silk, and are smaller than wax moth larvae. Source: Mark Hood (2011), with permission.



Life cycle. Source: Mark Hood (2011), with permission.

activity will cause honey to ferment and trickle out of the comb, leaving a smelly mess.

The best way to defeat SHB is to maintain strong hives, because here the bees can defend themselves and drive the beetles out. Not storing wet supers – or only doing so after fumigating them and then sealing them with industrial-sized cling film – will also minimise the risk of infestation, once the beetles reach the UK.

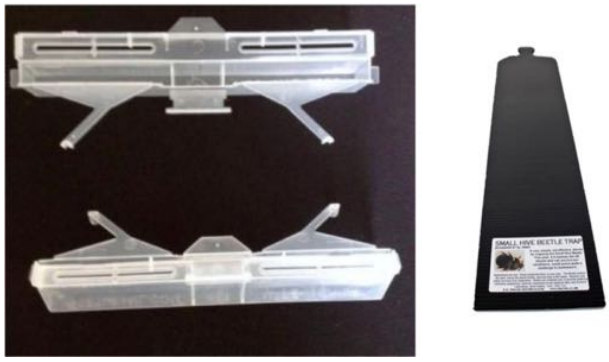
Adults will lay their eggs when temperatures are between 15°C and 45°C, and most enter hives just before nightfall. They are more active outside hives in warmer weather, less so during wet weather, and prefer to burrow into sandy rather than clay soils.

Geoff went on to describe what he labelled "IBMS" – an Integrated Beetle Management System – along the same lines as the IPMS for dealing with the varroa 'Pest'. This includes much of the usual 'good apiary hygiene' advice:

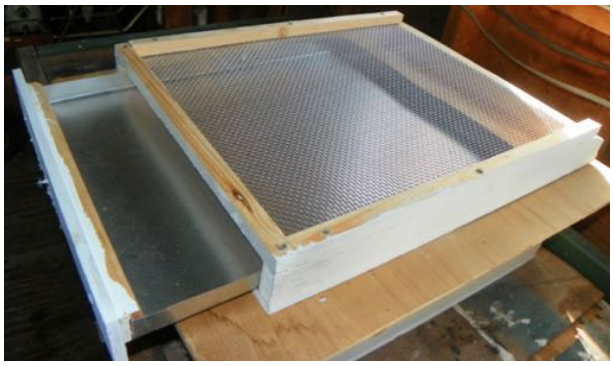
- Torch equipment as soon as it is removed from hives

The "slimed" mess on the frame, from the top of the frames and from the outside. Source: Mark Hood (2011), with permission.

- Remove unused comb and dummy down small colonies
- Use mechanical controls such as in-hive traps and beetle floors
- Use solid crown boards to close off hiding places for the beetles
- Don't use plastic spacers – which give beetles ideal cavities in which to hide
- Don't use pollen substitutes
- Change disease inspection methods by checking under the brood box first, and place supers inside the roof rather than across the top
- Seal roof vents with small-size mesh, but maintain open mesh floors
- Use rapid clearer boards, such as rhombus boards
- Do not store un-extracted and un-sterilised supers



One type of SHB trap, which goes between the frames and beetles drown in a mixture of oil and vinegar. Source: Mark Hood (2011), with permission.



The other type of SHB trap, which replaces the floor of the hive and beetles drown in a mixture of oil and vinegar. Source: Mark Hood (2011), with permission.

- Freeze extracted supers within 48 hrs of extraction to kill SHB eggs

We were then shown a couple of plastic traps which are filled with oil and a vinegar lure, which attracts the beetles, but from which they cannot then escape. The internet shows several other types of trap, mostly developed in the US where the beetle is already a problem.

Geoff finished his presentation by suggesting that we purchase a few 'natural bio-mechanical small hive beetle control machines' – chickens!

Mark went on to talk about NBU inspections for SHB, stating that the first full disease inspection starts by lifting the back of the brood box off the floor first, as SHB hides in dark places. Then, every frame – including all stores – must be inspected, which includes looking at the gap between the side of frames and the brood, before removing frames.

Mark also talked about his recent visit to USA, where it is endemic. He reported that those who use good Integrated Pest Management will be fine; whereas those that don't will be in trouble with failing hives and spoiled honey in storage. He also discussed traps, recommending the "Beetle Jail" which works like the Hood trap by attracting the beetle into a reservoir of oil. He suggest not using proprietary brands of beetle oil and attractant, but to instead use a mixture of olive oil (to kill the beetles) and cider vinegar (to attract them).

May in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

Swarm control

This is still the main priority. Routine inspections should be made every 7 days to check for queen cells. Make sure you have sufficient spare equipment for swarm control. Upon finding queen cells, you have sufficient time to close up the colony, go home to think things through and collate equipment. You are unlikely to have time to order equipment from a supplier, have it delivered and make it up. For anyone with access to Ted Hooper's "Guide to Bees and Honey", the Artificial Swarm method is covered extremely well on pages 138 to 140. After artificially swarming the colony, do not forget to continue to check the artificial swarm (the box with the old queen) to see whether it is producing further queen cells.

Removing honey

Another seasonal task in early June is removing and processing the spring honey brought in by the bees. This year we have had a fairly good spring and some members may have spring honey. If spring honey is removed then keep a watch on stores within the hive.

Collecting swarms

If your bees do swarm or you are called out to collect another swarm then personal and public safety should always be the overriding priority. Do not attempt to climb trees or use ladders beyond your capabilities. A simple order of action may be as follows:

- Make sure they are honey bees.
- If on someone else's land then obtain permission to enter from the landowner. If a branch of the tree needs to be cut then, again, make sure you have permission.
- Ensure any bystanders are moved away to a safe place.
- Put on bee suit and light smoker. Spraying the swarm with a fine mist of water is a refinement which will help keep the swarm in a cluster.

- Place a large sheet (an old bedsheet is ideal) on the ground underneath the swarm.
- After making sure that you are safe then deposit as much of the swarm as you can in a box or large bucket. Try to aim for 90% of the bees as you then have a 90% chance of including the queen.
- Turn box or bucket containing most of the collected swarm upside down on top of the middle of the sheet with a stone or piece of wood wedged between the box (or bucket) and the sheet. This allows access for the remaining bees.
- Come back at dusk to collect up the swarm by removing the stone and tying the sheet around the box. It can then be hived.

This Spring there has been reports of EFB in several areas of south London. If collecting a swarm from one of these areas then it should be quarantined and checked before transferring on to an apiary containing other hives.

Other action to be taken this month

Supers. Add supers as necessary, adding another in advance of it being needed by the bees. This may be either a brood super or a honey super, depending upon circumstances. When the bees are on the outer frames then it is time to add a super.

Varroa. Check varroa mite drop if not done in April or May.

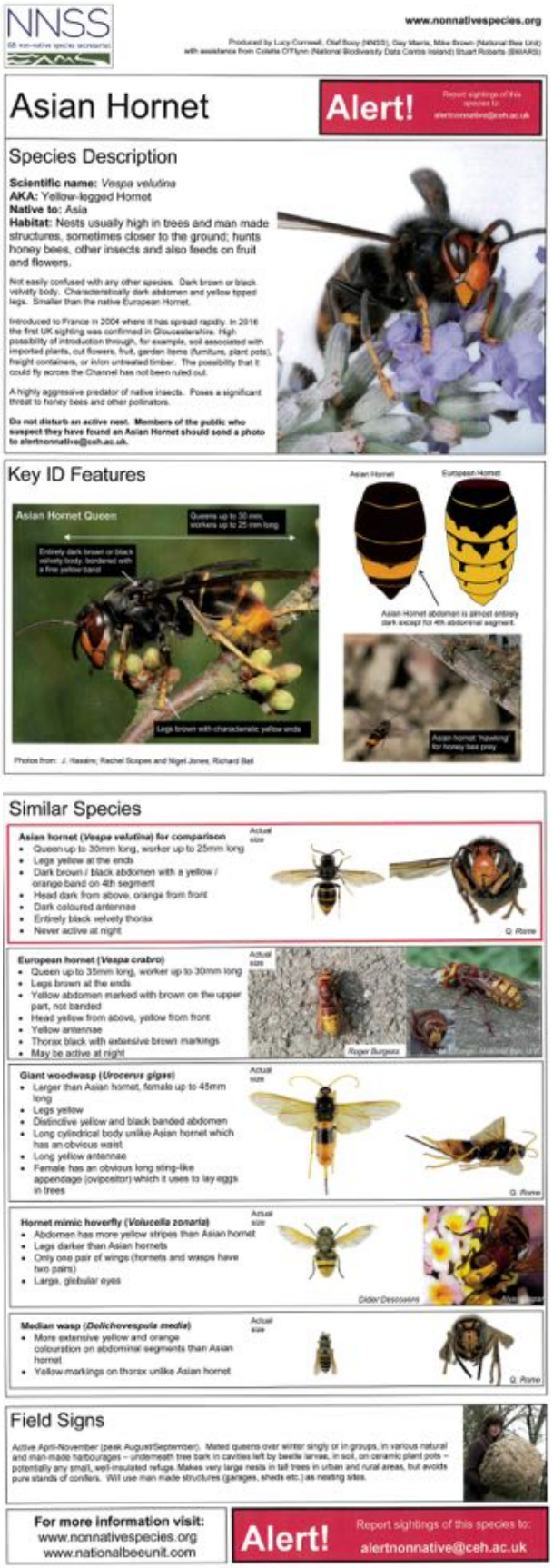
Asian Hornet. Finally, continue to be vigilant for the Asian Hornet. If you think you may have sighted one then it is essential to take a photo for submission to alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk. See guidance on page 7.

June in the Forage Patch

Mark's regular update on what things are in flower that bees like.

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

Early summer – June in particular – is a time of the year which brings uncertainty for many a beekeeper, and for those in rural areas in particular. June is the beginning of the summer season when the spring flowering plants and trees shed their blooms having been pollinated and now begin to form seeds, but the main flow of summer



Asian Hornet Identification leaflet. Source: BBKA website.

Red tailed bumblebee on bramble blossom.

Sedums blooming on a roof top in Chancery Lane.

flowering blooms has yet to begin. Beekeepers refer to this period of change as the June Gap.

At this time of year honey bee colonies are approaching their peak in worker population in readiness for the summer flow, queens are laying at a prolific rate and colonies have many larvae to feed. A reduction in incoming nectar and pollen as the spring flowers cease but the summer flowers are yet to peak can leave large colonies struggling to feed themselves or fill supers with surplus honey for the beekeeper.

Fortunately in urban areas like London the June Gap is rarely felt because our towns and cities contain an abundance of exotic plants which bloom throughout June, filling the gap in forage availability.

As I write this month's piece I'm in Northumberland for a family wedding. During the drive up from London I've been following the progress of the various flowering trees, shrubs and wild flowers growing along the motorway verges. Down in London, **horse chestnut** is all but over on the 1st of June but in Newcastle they are still in full flower with many inflorescence still to be pollinated. The same goes for **hawthorn** and **oil seed rape**. In London, hawthorn is now going over, oil seed rape is long over, but in the Midlands oil seed rape was still flowering, hawthorn was still flowering strongly

Foxgloves are out now.

A bumblebee on field scabious.

meanwhile in Newcastle and northwards oil seed rape in some fields is still in full bloom and the hawthorn is looking very fresh.

Throughput the whole 350 mile drive northwards I've been treated to carpets of **buttercup**, **ox-eye daisy**, **pink campion**, **tufted vetch**, **wild carrot**, **purple orchids** and **bird's foot trefoil** blooming in the road verges. Driving past Newcastle I passed a patch of **bee orchids** on the side of the A1.

Early summer flowers like **lime**, **sweet chestnut**, **oriental chestnut**, **pseudo acacia**, **bramble** and many of our flowering **hedgerow herbs** and **meadow flowers** have already begun to bloom. In the meadows around Tower Hamlets Cemetery and Mile End Parks in East London, **weld**, **scabious**, **sainfoin**, **lucerne**, **bugloss**, **rest-harrow** and **bird's foot trefoil** are in full bloom attracting **honey bees**, **cuckoo bumble bees**, **flower bees** and **leafcutter bees**.

Last week whilst inspecting my city centre roof top bees I noticed that the **sedums** on the green roofs are just starting to come into flower. Whilst of limited useful-

Honey bee on sedum ocre

Campanula blooms

ness to bees generally the sedums' brief few weeks of bloom do provide some much needed respite to pollinators in the very heart of the city where good forage is hard to come by. **Honey bees** and tiny **short-tongued solitary bees** are particularly frequent visitors to sedums on green roofs. Other plants important to city centre bees include **pyracantha (fire thorn) cotoneaster** and **ceonothus** which are often grown as amenity shrubbery and blooms of which provide much needed pollen and nectar.

In urban parks and gardens **privet** hedges are coming into bloom. Beekeepers loath privet because its nectar produces a bitter tasting honey that is unpalatable to most, but for the bees privet is a good source of forage. Other garden shrubs important as sources of nectar in urban areas include **hebe**, **choiysia**, **pyracantha** and **cotoneaster** – all are popular with bees and are widely planted in urban car parks, and amenity areas around housing developments. The latter two have already by-and-large finished flowering now, but **choiysia** and **hebe** often have a second flush of blossom and will continue to bloom well into summer.

Urban areas contain many exotic trees which flower after our native species have ceased flowering. These include **sweet chestnut**, **pseudo acacia**, and **Tree of Heaven**. Along railway embankments, **fire weed**, **thistles** and **teasel** are also blooming.

Right now in my garden, **nepeta**, **geraniums**, **campanulas**, **thyme**, **sage**, **valerian**, **perennial corn flower**, **wall flowers**, **escalonia**, **osteospurmums**, **teucrium**, **lamb's lugs**, **oriental poppy**, **knifophia**, **eremus** and **giant echiums** are in bloom attracting large numbers of bees. Soon the **lavender**, **echinops**, **cardoon** and **echinacea** should follow.

This month is a good time to 'Chelsea chop' late flowering perennials to extend the flowering season later in the year and ensure there are still flowers well into autumn for bees. Plants like **helenium**, **belianthius**, **golden rod (solidago)**, **asters**, **dahlias** and **leucanthemum** can be chopped back by about half. This will encourage multiple new flowering shoots from lower down the stem producing a larger mass of slightly smaller flowers later in the season, extending the forage for the bees and ensuring there is colour in your garden late in the season. Now is also a good time to take green cuttings from plants like **penstemon** which will root fast as long as they are kept moist – their deep tubular flowers are popular with longer tongued bumblebees.

Other plants like **perennial cornflower**, **oriental poppy**, **cat mint**, **sage** and **teucrium** can be chopped back very close to the ground once flowered at the end of this month, fed, watered and mulched they often produce a second flush of new growth and later flowering blooms. Other plants can be encouraged to continue flowering for longer by simply dead heading – removing the fading flowers before they have an opportunity to set seed. The plants desire is to reproduce so it will keep on sprouting new blooms until it does so or the season ends.

LBKA Apiaries

News from LBKA's apiaries. Just brief updates from three of our four apiaries this month.

Mudchute

Vlad Zamfir
LBKA Apiaries Manager and Mudchute Apiary Manager

Mudchute had a busy May with two consecutive weekends dedicated to the Bee Basic examinations (13th and 20th) and, as I was abroad from the 25th of May, I needed to minimise the chance that the hives would swarm. I artificially swarmed the most populous colony and now have a nuc which will help build up the Brockwell apiary.

In terms of honey production, 1 of the colonies (out of

5) had filled a super and most of them have at least 2 supers on and partly filled. The colony that was not doing well is still building up slowly but there are no clear signs of disease (chilled brood, which I did see after a cold spell and where affected larvae are black, is a condition not a disease) and I replaced the dark combs with new, drawn ones during the first week of May. By the end of the year they will hopefully be healthy.

Brockwell

Petros Hahladakis
LBKA Apiary manager for Brockwell

Still struggling at Brockwell although we are now up to two hives after having successfully requeend one colony (by placing a frame of eggs from the one viable one).

We are going to get back up to 3 this weekend after picking up one of the nucs from Mudchute this weekend and are hoping that the saying " a swarm in June, is worth a silver spoon" will bear fruit for us.

In terms of honey, we have one super that only has a few frames partially filled.

Eden

Richard Glassborow
LBKA Apiary manager for Eden

Eden reports all colonies in good shape. Unusually, our observation hive still has two queens (since September).

Bee Basic

Jonathan Dale was one of the LBKA members who took his BBKA Basic Assessment this year. Thanks to Howard for helping prepare everyone and for organising the practical component of the exam (with apiary manager, Vlad). We're still awaiting the results.
LBKA encourage all beekeepers to take the BBKA Basic Assessment after a year of beekeeping. Please contact Howard on education@lbka.org.uk in winter if you'd like to sign up.

Jonathan Dale
LBKA member

Having been keeping bees for 8 years, my BBKA Basic Assessment was well overdue. Previously I'd signed up but stalled thanks to a hatred of tests and concerns over the time commitment. I shouldn't have worried.

BBKA Basic Assessment practical exam at Mudchute. Photo: Vlad Zamfir.

In terms of revision, Howard led us through the syllabus over three two hour sessions on Tuesday evenings in March. The syllabus comprises a practical examination of a hive, and then a discussion around beekeeping, swarm control and disease. Howard's tuition was excellent and the lessons felt much shorter than they were. While the bulk of the material was familiar, I definitely learnt more and also found it very helpful structuring my knowledge to support my beekeeping.

The test was on a sunny Sunday in May at Mudchute Apiary. I'd never been before, but the park is lovely and I would recommend a visit. I made up a frame while the previous exam was taking place, and then we had the inspection. The examiner asked me to explain a few things, and also provided his own advice and experience on some other aspects. He did this in a very supportive way that was more in the tone of "have you tried doing it like this before" rather than "well you made a pigs ear of that".

The conversation afterwards was very straightforward thanks to Howard's preparation. As we were sat by the footpath in our bee suits, several members of the public passed and asked us about the bees and apiary – given most of these questions were on the syllabus the examiner had to point them in my direction so I wasn't very grateful for the extended test! But luckily last week I found out I'd survived. If you're on the fence I would definitely recommend it, a minimal commitment that has helped highlight my bad habits and re-invigorated my interest in beekeeping.

The 51st Sting

LBKA member Adam Armstrong talks about his experience of developing allergic reactions to bee stings. This has been previously published in the Barnet Beekeepers' Newsletter.

Adam Armstrong
LBKA member

Bee sting.

July 2017

As I conducted my first inspection of 2017 in March I found both of my over-wintered colonies to be very strong, on the first inspection both with 8/9 frames of brood. I am restricted by space to keeping no more than three colonies at any one time, but having previously lost a weak and small colony with nosema in the winter months due to isolation starvation, I decided to take two colonies through the winter with the plan to unite them. I stuck to my plans hoping that my united colony would swarm early and before I went away on a wild camping trip to the Hebrides. The bees decided to stick to my plan and charged queen cells allowed me to complete the AS days before heading off. Lucie very kindly offered to inspect my bees while I was away, Thank you Lucie.

When I arrived back in June everything was going to plan, I had more full supers than I had had in the previous year.

At the end of July I was ready to harvest the honey, I had cleared the bees from the supers and was removing the boxes from the hives when a bee crawled into my marigolds. How did this happen you may be wondering? The elasticated thumb loop broke off and I hadn't got around to getting it repaired and the sleeve of my suit lifted up. I decided to give the bee a good smack before the inevitable happened but as I went to smack my hand I felt the sting and I was already in motion of smacking the bee and it was too late to pull out receiving a full dose of bee venom very quickly and directly into a vein.

Immediately the area around the sting had swollen up which was unusual, I felt fine but in a hurry I closed up the hive and packed everything away, the supers were off, the hives stacked away. I started feeling an itchy sensation on the palm of my right hand and it was close enough to where I was stung to think it was just a greater reaction than usual. It was only when the palm on my other hand started itching that I realised this was a more severe reaction than I have previously experienced from a bee sting. At this point I was concerned about how the reaction might develop. I was focused on my breathing and at no point did I note any changes in my breathing pattern or have any difficulties but for

Three days later... The result of the sting, the swelling was all the way to my elbow.

the next hour I was staying alert. The itchy sensation quickly spread to my scalp and I felt extremely hot all over. After an hour I felt quite sleepy and I went for a lie down and I ended up falling asleep. I woke up to a throbbing pain in my arm which was really swollen, it felt heavy. The swelling continued to get worse over the next few days, not helped by a set build project involving lots of lifting. By the end of the week the swelling started to recede and I could see my knuckles again.

In a rush... well two months later, I went to see my local GP who recommended that I see a specialist particularly because of my weekly interaction with honey bees.

I went to see the allergy consultant and described my symptoms.

He replied, "Would you be surprised if I said you were allergic to bee stings? Obviously that is the reason you have come to see me today because you think that might be the case. You did experience a serious reaction, you need to avoid being stung but I'm not going to tell you to give up, just avoid being stung".

He prescribed three epipens, first one for me to keep with my beekeeping equipment, the second one is to be kept in my car and the third one is for me to carry everywhere with me. I had never been stung by a bee until I started beekeeping. I remember my first sting in the training at the Barnet BKA training apiary, I said "I think I have been stung". So I was suprised to be told I should carry the epipen around with me all of the time, – they are not small, definitely not the size of a pen!

In the hospital I was sent for tests. Apparently they didn't have bee venom to test on me but they tested me for many other things. I had no reaction to anything,

Sent for tests at the allergy clinic.

just a slight reaction to the control to the surprise of the consultant. I went to the respiritory clinic for tests on lung function to make sure there were no complications when I fell asleep. I was also sent for a chest x-ray and then a blood test. Fortunately the lung function tests showed no complications.

The consultant told me that I had two options: the first option would be to rely on the epipen alone and the second option would be to start desensitisation therapy. Apparently there are not many allergies that can be successfully treated but desensitisation to bee stings does actually work although it can take a while. I decided that desensitisation would be the best option for me and he referred me to a specialist at South Kensington Hospital to begin treatment.

The chemical make up of bee stings is different to that of wasps and hornets – although some chemicals are shared, it is very unlikely that I would experience an allergic reaction.

Before I could begin the desensitisation I had to see another consultant, who said "Have you considered giving up beekeeping, I would". This was a completely different view from that of both my local GP and the previous allergy consultant. Both consultants did warn me that the sting reactions could get worse and while the next sting may not have much of a reaction, the following sting could be serious and potentially my last! I was also directed that, if I felt the need to use my epipen, not to wait until it's too late, but also not to use it if I didn't need to.

I need to be very careful around bees and now take twice as long preparing myself for inspecting colonies. I was stung in a vein and smacking the bee injected me with all of the venom very quickly, which I think made this reaction so much worse than previous stings. I would always scrape out the sting before getting a whole dose of venom from the pumping venom sack that remains.

I purchased a very expensive bee suit from Sheriff for 'sensitive beekeepers' with extra lining inside. It's hot enough in the usual apiarist suits, I am going to suffer in the summer heat when inspecting my hives.

Ok, so its' probably not the 51st sting, I stopped counting after the 15th but it's probably a good estimate.

It is suggested that beekeepers are more likely to develop an allergy to bee stings than the average person. I think it was my first sting of the beekeeping year – this was an important factor according to the consultants and something all beekeepers need to be aware of. I may have not received a bee sting for nearly a year prior to this one because of the off season and what I consider to be good handling.

If I am not getting stung during inspections, it would suggest my handling of bees is good. The downside of this is that I'm not receiving enough stings to keep up my immunity against bee stings. I am not suggesting you should get stung more often, there is no target number to guarantee immunity.

As we begin the beekeeping year, we will not have been exposed to bee stings for a while, for me I don't think I had been stung since the previous year. I can't remember when exactly but it was likely to have been 10 months, possibly even 11 months earlier. This was a question asked by the consultant. Our body's immunity to bee stings changes and we can become more likely to develop a reaction as a result. It is important to understand the symptoms and know what to do if a bad reaction occurs.

It is said that 'Beekeepers' wives' are also at risk of bee sting allergies because they are exposed to faint traces of bee sting chemicals that remain in bee suits (not that it's just men that keep bees, beekeepers' husbands also).

May 2018

I have just started going through the process of immunotherapy. I got my first dose of 0.1mg of bee venom that will gradually increase to 100mg . It is quite a commitment. I am required to attend every week for the first 12 and then it will become a monthly visit, but it has been suggested that the therapy will last 3 years. After receiving the injection with a needle much larger than a bee sting, I am observed for an hour before I can leave. If I do have a reaction from a dose of bee venom they will reduce the dosage on the next visit.

In three years time I should have an increased tolerance to bee sting venom, I think the equivalent of 2/3 bee stings. I think even once I reach that point I will still need to carry an in-date epipen in my beekeeping kit.

None of us are exempt from suffering a serious reaction even if we have never shown any signs of a reaction to a bee's sting previously. It is very important for us all to be able to recognise the signs of a greater reaction and know what to do.

So make sure you are well protected when inspecting your colonies (especially when you are taking the bees' honey!).

Lifecycle of the Asian Hornet

What is the Asian Hornet and how does it live? Geoff has some answers.

Geoffrye Hood
LBKA member

As expected, the Asian hornet has now reached our shores, with two 2016 sightings in the West Country at Tewkesbury, Mendips. October 2017 yielded a further sighting at Woolacombe, Devon, i.e. outside the search area based on the two previous 2016 sightings. This does not bode well: it could mean that there is a founder nest somewhere south of Exmoor. The Woolacombe nest was situated not in a high tree, as expected, but in a hedge a few feet from a very busy tourist footpath. No one had recognised this nest as a foreign invader for six months, until it was traced by flight line from the hives that were being hawked by the hornets. This illustrates how difficult it is to spot a hornet in the open, unless it is hawking a bee colony – let alone finding a nest in farmland in the west of England where the hornets might feed on a feral honey bee colony.

Out of hibernation

The lifestyle of the Asian Hornet it is similar to that of some of our wasps. There are, however, subtle differences. The Asian hornet queen hibernates, but wakes up slightly earlier than UK queen wasps. Initially, the Asian hornet queen requires sugar and, like our wasps, she begins to make a paper foundling nest of first 8 or 10 then 35 to 40 cells. She then starts laying eggs, which means that as well as sugar she now needs to collect a protein-rich diet of chewed insect larvae, insect muscles or carrion to feed her own larvae. At this time, the nest is very vulnerable and dependent upon the queen herself collecting sufficient protein. The queen warms her larvae by sleeping curled around them, and feeds on the sugary excretion from the larvae. Hibernated queens have a high failure rate, but a failing queen never starts again, but instead will try to usurp another foundling nest nearby.

Asian Hornet, personally caught by Geoff in France for our education.

Expansion phase

Once the foundling nest is established, which takes 50 days, the new worker hornets will take over feeding the young larvae. Both workers and queen are now rewarded by the sticky sweet substance that the larvae extrude when fed. Once the nest is sufficiently large the Hornets will scout for a food source sufficient to supply the nest during its expansion phase. If food is insufficient in the foundling nest area, the colony will up sticks and build a new nest closer to a food source. Usually this second nest is very high in a tree, and hidden from view. Its food source can be either a honeybee colony, a protein source such as a meat or fish market, or even a large wasp colony. The main protein source is said to be our beloved honeybee, however in a rural situation the Asian hornet will only get 20% of their protein from honeybees, with the other 80% coming from a range of wasps larvae, hawking of hoverflies, solitary bees and other protein such as carrion. This soon has a devastating effect on pollinators in the countryside

In an urban environment, the hornets turn to scavenging on takeaway fried chicken, other food waste or market food stalls, which all offer an ample source of protein. But due to the higher density of honeybee colonies in urban areas, the proportion of the hornet's diet from honey bees increases to 50%.

Reproduction phase

Hornets are more likely to be seen hawking around hives in September /October, during the nest's reproduction stage. The nest now requires additional proteins to produce a large number of drones, whereas other food sources (such as other pollinators) have long since gone. The hornet queens that emerge will mate and then stay in the area of their mother's nest, feeding for a period of two or three weeks before dispersing over a radius of between 50 miles and 60 miles. This means that if Asian hornets are indeed already established in the West Country, then we can expect the Asian hornet to reach London within five years. Keep a watch, using the pictures on page 7.

Facebook (In)digest(ion)

Some of the highlights from LBKA's public facing Facebook page.

Natalie Cotton
admin@lbka.org.uk

"Drone Blues" by Jimi Hendrix, 'I'm a King Bee" by The Rolling Stones, and "I'm a Be(e)liever" by The Monkees all featured on Jonathan Lingham's beekeeping themed fantasy Desert Island Discs playlist. Geordy Mark has suggested that this form the basis of a playlist for the LBKA summer social – so do post your suggestions on Facebook or send to admin@lbka.org.uk.

Please also take the time to fill in the COLOSS honey bee colony loss survey, shared by Norman Carreck on Facebook and emailed to all members. Norman also shared the results of last year's survey.

Geordy Mark has been carrying out experiments with colour marked drones. After moving a split hive over four miles, he found several of them back at their original site. Clearly his colony hadn't read the books featuring the three mile rule.

Is it just us or are queen cells getting longer? Both Richard Glassborrow and Geordy Mark shared pictures of cells several centimetres longer than the average.

Visiting Aussie Roy Murphy Spud is keen to meet up with London beekeepers during his visit in June. Contact him via Facebook or at stickyprickbeehaven@gmail.com.

Angela Woods posted a picture of a bait hive in a rural orchard that had attracted a very unusual occupant – a bat! Bradley Hopper commented that bats are also pollinators – although they don't generally cohabit with honey bees.

Finally, have you seen the viral video telling the story of a 'friendship' between a wingless bumble queen and the lady who found her? Patricia Pelican shared this group along with other stories of animals befriending humans.

Guest Blog

I'd like to feature a guest blog article from a member every month here. If you write a blog, I'd love to be able to reuse your content here (no extra effort for you!) Please let me know on services@lbka.org.uk.

Members' marketplace

This section is for members offering beekeeping items or services to members or requesting items. Items could include nucs, wax and honey. Email services@lbka.org.uk to add something here.

[Hive and Keeper]

Upcoming events

Sunday 10th June: Bee Health Day

10:00-13:00 and 14:00-17:00 at Walworth Garden (206 Manor Pl, Braganza St, SE17 3BN)

Our special Bee Health Day will see Richard, Geoff, Karin and Tristram talking about recognising and mitigating against bee diseases. It will include inspection of a hive and inspection of other comb. Due to the hands-on nature of the day, we require people to register in advance (members will have got an email about this). We will run the same session in the morning and the afternoon and are limiting numbers to 20 per session, prioritising those who have bees. Members only please.

Tuesday 26th June: Monthly Social

*from 18:30 at **The Gladstone** (64 Lant St, London SE1 1QN, UK).*

This real community pub is (perhaps) the only pub in London run by a family of Indian descent. They have an excellent pie and a pint for £9.99 offer – and it's a curry pie – what's not to like?

Sunday 8th July: Monthly meeting: Honey treatment, properties and extraction

11:00-13:00 at Fairley House Junior School, 220 Lambeth Rd, London SE1 7JY

All about extracting honey. Followed by the usual hot drinks, cake and chat. Meetings are for members only, but you're welcome to come as a guest to find out more about our association.

Committee

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with a member of the committee if you have any questions, requests, suggestions. We are:

- **Chair:** Richard Glassborow, chair@lbka.org.uk
- **Treasurer:** David Hankins, treasurer@lbka.org.uk
- **Secretary:** Natalie Cotton, admin@lbka.org.uk
- **Education:** Howard Nichols education@lbka.org.uk
- **Membership:** Aidan Slingsby, services@lbka.org.uk
- **Forage:** Mark Patterson, forage@lbka.org.uk
- **Events:** Emily Abbott, events@lbka.org.uk
- **Resources:** Tristram Sutton, resources@lbka.org.uk
- **Apiaries:** Vlad Zamfir, apiaries@lbka.org.uk
- **Development:** Simon Saville, development@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Elliot Hodges, mentor@lbka.org.uk

Our website is http://www.lbka.org.uk/ and the pictures are in the same order as the names above.