



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

June, 2020

Our online events continue with our second online Monthly Meeting on Sunday. It will be about Bee Health and as well as hearing from experienced beekeepers about monitoring the health of your hives and disease management practices, there will be the chance to air your views. We will also have the Pub Social on the last Tuesday of the month. Other associations are also offering online events – see a couple in our announcements section.

This month, Janet gives us her first-hand experience of collecting a swarm (p8), Deborah gives us a summary of what she has been reading (p12), Mark tells us how to plant a window box and Simon gives us an update on the “London Bee Situation” (p6). Thanks also to Richard (p1), Howard (p7), Mark (p10) and Tristram (p6) for their regular contributions. And to Martin for proof-reading.

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A big thank you to this month's contributors: **Deborah Blythe, Janet Evans, Richard Glassborow, Geoff Hood, Martin Hudson, Howard Nichols, Mark Patterson, Simon Saville and Tristram Sutton.** Would you like to join these esteemed contributors? If so, do contact me.

Happy beekeeping.

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

From our Chair

Some of you may have caught the recent report on the BBC asking for public help concerning Asian Hornet. From the sound of it the story had come from a press release from the BBKA and APHA but I don't know where the tone of the narrative and particularly the vocabulary came from. I have to say, I always find words like, “invasion” worryingly sensationalist.

I am not for one moment suggesting the Asian Hornet is not a threat to pollinators, including honey bees. I have seen them at work in France, they are impressive



One of Mark's “London Mongrel” queens. Photo: Mark Patterson.

and effective predators. But I do think it is unnecessary to demonise any creature just because it's way of life causes inconvenience to ours. When stories are sensationalised it usually leads to disproportionate responses, often culminating in innocent lives being put at risk. And let us not forget, the Asian Hornet is not invading, it is hitch-hiking. Like most exotic "pests", it is here because of us – we brought it or helped it get here.

I also think it is a particular mistake to mix this narrative with an appeal for public help in identifying said demon. That heady mix all too easily leads to vigilantism. And ask any swarm collector how often a report of a swarm of bees turns out to be wasps and you can see the problem: mistaken identity can have fatal consequences for the innocent.

To be fair, the Asian hornet notice recently sent to all Beekeeping Associations, including LBKA, from the BBKA/NBU asking us to set up Asian Hornet Action Teams (AHATs) was predominantly about identification and disseminating information throughout our local communities and businesses and how to report sightings. This the LBKA is doing. But that programme also asked these teams to set up monitoring traps and the Trustees of LBKA do have a problem with these.

As the name suggests, monitoring traps lure the target species into something they can't get out of so they can be recorded. This is usually carried out on a daily basis and any subjects, target or otherwise, can be released unharmed. They are a standard research tool.

Our concern is that, as an add on task for non research specialists, there is a high probability that many traps will not be checked every day and so will become kill traps. Inevitably, this will lead to the death of a great many non target insects since such traps are not species specific. Worse, the NBU/BBKA are particularly asking for spring trapping so that queens can be found and destroyed before they have established their nests. Given the current numbers and distribution of Asian hornet in the UK, the probability of finding solitary queens has to be remote, even in areas where they have been known. But at this time of year there will be breeding queens of countless other species. Killing large numbers of these would be a very bad thing. So we have written to the BBKA and NBU, requesting this element of the strategy be revised.

Incidentally, the LBKA AHAT is being organised by Elliot Hodges. If you are interested in volunteering please contact him on mentor@lbka.org.uk.

Briefly, a reminder while still on the subject of responsible environmental behaviour: if you haven't already read the London Bee Situation report, I urge you to do so. The trustees consider it to be of possibly existential importance to beekeeping in London that the current situation is better understood. That is as far as the report goes at this stage but it is the foundation on which all members may contribute to an internal debate so that the LBKA can establish a clear consen-



Spotted by Sally: Small garden bumblebee Bombus hortorum on Rosa rugosa. Photo: Sally Haywill.

sus as to its position regarding responsible beekeeping in London. There will then be a question of what, if anything, to do.

This debate has already begun. We have received some very helpful and considered responses already. The report will be presented to members at the online monthly meeting on July 12th, at which we will have a debate, involving as many members as possible. This is something our organisation has never done before.

The outcome of that debate, together with subsequent feedback will lead to a draft "Position Statement" for formal adoption at the AGM in November. During this process, ideas on what actions and behaviour this might lead to will inevitably surface and develop. That is the proposed timeline. At some point we intend to share our position statement with neighbouring BKAs in and around Greater London, gradually widening awareness of it. But right now is the membership's time. If you have any thoughts on this, please contact me at chair@lbka.org.uk or Simon at development@lbka.org.uk or Aidan at services@lbka.org.uk.



Spotted by Sally: Hoverfly. Photo: Sally Haywill.

Announcements

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

June's online Monthly Meeting and Pub Social

Bee Health will be the topic of June's Monthly Meeting, on **Sunday 14th June** at **11:00** via Zoom. We will have a **team** of presenters and a **panel** for Q&A in what will be an important and insightful meeting, especially given the higher-than-usual levels of EFB in London at the moment. All members will have the **Zoom link to join in their email** (contact services@lbka.org.uk if you don't). Supply your own coffee and cake!

Our **Pub Social** will be via **Zoom** again on **Tuesday 30th June** from 18:30.

The London Bee Situation

Thank you to all those who've read our London Bee Situation draft document. A special thanks for those who have fed back comments about this.

We are sending the documents to members again by e-mail this week, and would urge you to read it and consider joining our July Monthly Meeting on 12th July to join the debate. We will anonymously summarise the comments we receive before then and will circulate them next month. Please also see Simon's piece on page 6.

Help needed at our East London apiary

We're short-staffed at our Mudchute apiary – see more information on page 6.



*Spotted by Sally: Red tailed Bumblebee on Wild Cabbage.
Photo: Sally Haywill.*

Help needed with our Social Media

We need a hand with our various social media outputs and would love to talk to you, particularly if you're able to help and have experience in this area. Please contact Aidan at services@lbka.org.uk.

Summer lecture programme

We're by no means the only beekeeping organisation doing online events. Advanced Beekeeping Courses have a **summer webinar programme** by Ken and Dan Basterfield on specialist topics. It's £2.50 per lecture and you can [see the programme here](#).

Beekeepers' Question Time

The Central Association of Beekeepers are organising **Beekeepers' Question Time** on **17th June**. Your chance to quiz the experts, encompassing all areas of scientific, technical and practical beekeeping. The panel comprises **Robert Pickard** (Emeritus Professor

of Neurobiology), **Celia Davis** (written two highly regarded books on bees), **John Chapple** (former LBKA Chair and continuing member) and **Roger Patterson** (well-know beekeeper who writes for Dave Cushman's website, is involved in lots of beekeeping organisations and has been a past Trustee of BBKA) [Register here](#).

Bee part of the A-Team

Would you like to be part of LBKA's [Asian Hornet Action Team](#)? You would need to learn how to identify Asian Hornet reliably and you would assist with local requests for help in identifying Asian Hornets. Communication will be via a special WhatsApp group. If you're interested, contact Elliot on mentor@lbka.org.uk.

Maintaining beekeeping networks

Beekeeping is much easier when there is a local network who keep in touch and help each other out. This is why beekeeping associations are organised into local branches.

This is even more important during the current COVID-19 pandemic, whilst – of course – adhering to UK Government rules on social distancing. For example, some members – if self-isolating or otherwise incapacitated – may not be able to inspect and attend to their bees on a regular basis, especially if their bees are located at an out-apiary. It may be appropriate to have contingencies in place in such cases. Let us know if you can help, or the follow the suggestions below.

LBKA encourages and tries to facilitate members forming local networks. Ways of doing so include:

- **Bee Banter:** Being on the 'Bee Banter' WhatsApp group or members-only Facebook page or offering and asking for help when needed.
- **Sharing contact details:** Seeing [details of members](#) who've "opted-in" to share their contact details. If you want to opt-in, you can now do so in the [members' area](#)
- Maintaining contact with former mentors or mentees, if applicable.

The [members' area](#) on the website has more details. Email us if you need any help and we'll see what we can do.

Honey for sale?

Ask service@lbka.org.uk if you'd like it to be added to [our honey page](#).

Old announcements from May

Check our [previous newsletters](#) or contact services@lbka.org.uk for more details.

NNSS
Non-Native Species Secretariat
www.nonnativespecies.org

Produced by Lucy Curran, Cliff Bony (NNSS), Guy Harris, Miss Brown (National Bee Unit) with assistance from Colette O'Hara, National Biodiversity Data Centre (Ireland) Stuart Roberts (BKAUK)

Asian Hornet

Alert! Report sightings of this species to: alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk

Species Description


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

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

Introduced to France in 2004 where it has spread rapidly. In 2016 the first UK sighting was confirmed in Gloucestershire. High possibility of introduction through, for example, soil associated with imported plants, cut flowers, fruit, garden items (furniture, plant pots), freight containers, or Asian untreated timber. The possibility that it could fly across the Channel has not been ruled out.

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

Do not disturb an active nest. Members of the public who suspect they have found an Asian Hornet should send a photo to alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk.



Key ID Features

Asian Hornet Queen
 Queens up to 30mm, workers up to 25mm long
 Entirely dark brown or black when fully developed with a fine yellow band
 Legs brown with characteristic yellow ends

Asian Hornet vs European Hornet
 Asian-Hornet abdomen is almost entirely dark except for 4th abdominal segment

Asian hornet 'hovering' for honey bee prey

Photos from: J. Haasini, Rachel Scopes and Nigel Jones, Richard Bell

Similar Species

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

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

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

Hornet mimic hoverfly (*Vespa velutina*)
 Actual size
 • Abdomen has more yellow stripes than Asian hornet
 • Legs darker than Asian hornets
 • Only one pair of wings (hornets and wasps have two pairs)
 • Large, globular eyes

Median wasp (*Dolichovespula media*)
 Actual size
 • More extensive yellow and orange colouration on abdominal segments than Asian hornet
 • Yellow markings on thorax unlike Asian hornet

Field Signs

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

For more information visit:
www.nonnativespecies.org
www.nationalbeehiveunit.com

Alert! Report sightings of this species to: alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk

Asian Hornet Identification leaflet. Source: BKA website.



Our committee meeting (Aidan sporting his cool reflective glasses... or is that just screen glare in the twilight?)

Honey Bee Colony Winter Losses Survey: If you haven't already done so, please consider filling out COLOSS' "Honey Bee Colony Winter Losses Survey".

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.

June's Committee meeting

Here, we keep you up to date with what the committee discuss at our monthly committee meetings (and what keeps us awake at night). Let us know if you can help or have any suggestions that might help.

Aidan Slingsby
services@lbka.org.uk

The committee reflected on last month's monthly meeting and "pub" social. We considered that these events went well and that we should continue to run them, but will try in involve more members to contribute to these meetings. We are still planning subsequent month's meetings, but upcoming meetings are June's Bee Health Day, July's London Bee Situation and August's Pollen and Pollination.

Members' feedback on the "London Bee Situation" has been positive, with some quite detailed responses. Thank you! We hope to keep the debate going and try to get members to prepare for the discussion in July's monthly meeting.

We are looking for help running our Social Media and to get involved with our Mudchute apiary. We will put out a call to members to ask for help.

We also had from reports back from some committee members. Richard reported that although the Schools Food Matters visits to schools will not go ahead this year, we are considering whether we might be able to run online sessions next year. Elliot reported that two people (so far) have signed up to be part of the Asian Hornet Action Team. David reported that we have some applicants interested in our Pollination Fund.

London Bee Situation

Simon Saville
development@lbka.org.uk

We recently circulated the latest London Bee Situation Report by email to Members. Feedback we received was very supportive and some useful comments were made. Thank you to everyone who responded – we value your feedback. After all, the LBKA is a member-led organisation.

As a reminder, the Report sets out LBKA's view of the current situation in London, comparing availability of forage (nectar and pollen) and the density of registered honey bee colonies. It shows that honey bee colonies are very unevenly distributed across London. Some areas have very few colonies; elsewhere there are places with more than 30 registered colonies per square km. Quite often, these places are close to other areas with high colony densities, so we have "hot spots".

Similarly, forage is unevenly distributed. We have had further discussions with external experts, notably Professor Ratnieks at LASI (Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects at the University of Sussex) and Professor Stevenson at Kew. The latter is writing a paper that will refer to honey bee and forage distribution in London. We will share it when published.

Prompted by this, I took another look at GiGL's forage data. The findings are quite stark:

- GiGL estimated that there was a total of about 7,000 hectares of "good quality forage" across London as a whole
- Given that London's area is around 170,000 hectares, this is an average of around 4 hectares of good quality forage per 100 hectares (4% coverage)

Furthermore:

- There is very little forage at a density of more than 20% coverage
- One third of London's area has a forage density of less than 1% coverage

- 80% of London's area has less than 5% coverage of forage

Although this dates from 2009, I don't think the picture has changed that much. So, alongside colony density "hotspots", we have forage "cold spots". As the maps show, these tend to coincide.

The Report we shared deliberately stops short of suggesting actions beyond LBKA's current position, which is to promote Better beekeeping, Better public understanding of bees, and a Better environment for bees and Londoners. For example:

- To promote the benefits of beekeeping – and of beekeeping in London
- To promote the LBKA Guidelines for Responsible Urban Beekeeping, to members and beyond
- To promote LBKA's "Bees and Flowers Go Together" initiative
- To promote LBKA's Pollinator Fund – small grants for habitat improvement
- When approached, encourage companies not to introduce new apiaries in central London (or in hotspots) if their motivation is based on a desire to "help the bees"

Among the responses we have had so far, one member said that she was "bee watching" rather than beekeeping – another way to enjoy the wonders of these creatures.

Another commented that "keeping bees for honey is not necessarily the same as keeping bees for nature". This goes to the core of the complex issues at play, and starts to ask the question: "so, what are we proposing should be done about all this?"

An important step will be the Monthly Meeting on 12th July, which will be on this topic. This is intended to spark conversations about "so what?" – to start discussions about whether LBKA should go further in its statements and actions, and if so how far.

The aim will be to bring proposals to the AGM in November for ratification, if that's the view of members.

LBKA Apiaries

Our Apiaries manager Tristram updates us on what's going on with our apiaries.

Tristram Sutton
apiaries@lbka.org.uk

Of our apiaries, Mudchute (Isle of Dogs, East London) is now very short staffed. Currently, weekly inspections are being carried out by Andrew Slade and me,



Our Mudchute apiary in "rural" East London.

with some others due to return soon. However, we're looking for more people to get involved in the weekly inspections. There is plenty of opportunity to practice your skills and broaden your experience by working with the three colonies and a recent split into a nucleus. Inspections are currently on Monday afternoons but this could be changed according to the availability.

If you have never visited, it is a wonderful site beside a very large wild flower meadow which allows you to leave the city at least for the time of the inspection! We have been following government beekeeping guidelines so are aware of the need to social distance and limit the number of people in the apiary at any one time.

Please let me know if you are interested in joining the Mudchute Apiary Crew (if only for a visit) by contacting Tristram on apairies@lbka.org.uk.



Members' Apiary in lockdown. Fully-laden hive in Geoff's NW7 apiary, "what a proper hive looks like in lockdown. Six supers of which four are capped."

We'd like to feature members' apiaries during lockdown. Please send contributions to

June 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 of colonies which have not yet swarmed this year 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 then Artificial Swarm method is covered extremely well on pages 138 to 140. The Beebase website also has a helpsheet for free download. 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. The "swarming mindset" continues for a couple of weeks after the beekeeper has performed the manipulation. Regarding the other box (the one with queen cells), I usually reduce the queen cells down to 1 but also need to check this box once a few days later (if no further queen cells then it cannot have the eggs or small larvae to make new queen cells after that and should be left alone). The box containing the queen will need further checks for a couple of weeks.

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 an exceptionally good spring and some members may have spring honey. If spring honey is removed then keep a watch on stores within the hive during June. Nucs and single box colonies should always be monitored for stores as such entities are a "work in progress", not the completed article.

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. Please do not attempt to climb trees or use ladders beyond your capabilities.

This Spring there has been lots of reports of EFB across London. If collecting a swarm from elsewhere then it should be quarantined and checked before transferring on to an apiary containing other hives.

Other action to be taken this month

Add 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.

Prepare for the Summer honey flow. Ensure you have enough equipment to deal with this.

Check varroa. Check the 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. The LBKA Asian Hornet team is being headed up by Elliot Hodges. We do



The nucleus box that Geoff lent me.

need volunteers for different areas of London. Please do consider to be a volunteer and contact him on mentor@lbka.org.uk.

My First Swarm

A new beekeeper's first swarming experience – expect the unexpected .

Janet Evans
LBKA member

I realised there was trouble brewing – I could see an excellent example of a capped queen cell. The queen was still in the hive but obviously they were getting warmed up to leave. A small feeling of panic arose within me.

When I first decided to become a beekeeper it was a

very tentative decision. I decided it would be one step at a time. Attend the LBKA course with mentoring for a year, learn all I could, build the hive, install it on the allotment, acquire the bees, keep them disease free, get the colony through the winter intact, see if the colony built up the following year and then, maybe, if I was lucky, and capable of taking it off, I might have some honey to share with friends and family.

I did not anticipate swarm collection: prevent a swarm at all costs was my view. Of course having not even covered a whole year of beekeeping, I might have someone more experienced to come and inspect my hive, to reassure me that I was on the right track, or let me know where I was going wrong. I, as everyone, had not bargained with Covid-19.

So following the panic, I calmed down slightly and spoke to Geoff (my unofficial mentor) who kindly offered to lend me a nuc. So that evening I made up some brood frames. The following morning I collected the nuc box with the intention of moving the queen and some frames from the hive in the hope it might stop the swarm happening. As Geoff was shielding I didn't see him, but the nuc was there outside his house waiting for me as promised. As I was driving away a friend phoned me, I quickly said "I can't talk now I'm on my way to stop my bees from swarming." Famous last words.

I arrived at the "apiary," or as I call it "the enclosure," around mid-afternoon. Kitted up in my PPE, I took a deep breath and plunged in. Twice I went through the frames – no queen. The first time I thought I'd missed her, the second time I felt despondent at my incompetence. It did vaguely occur to me there might be fewer bees in situ than the day before, but I wasn't too sure. I thought, "Well what do I do now?" and a sudden dawning occurred. "Maybe they've swarmed already," but I wasn't confident. Cursing the Covid, the lockdown and myself for not being properly prepared, I closed the hive and started looking up into the very large oak trees nearby.

I called my friend who had rung earlier and said "I don't know what's happened, I've no idea where they've gone, if they are in the oak tree, I'll never get them back -" Suddenly I shrieked – there was the swarm – in front of me, at head height, about ten yards away, on my allotment on a small hawthorn tree! All the time I was searching through the hive, the swarm had hung there! It just hadn't occurred to me to look around.

Another call to Geoff, "They've swarmed! What do I do now?" I think he must have detected the rising hysteria in my voice. He talked me down. I just had to get on with it. "Shake them into the box" he said. Yes, I had read all about this in the books, it sounds really easy doesn't it? So I found a large white piece of plastic sheeting (allotments are quite useful for accumulating junk), laid it beneath the tree, with a slight upward slope, put the box on top and cut the branch and shook the swarm into the box.

Realising that all of this may take some time, Alan my dearest, had gone home to get the dinner on so I was definitely on my own with this swarm.

The branch was a little too big, I was a little too slow with the roof, so when I looked around there were hardly any bees in the box. They'd absconded again, flying around like mad things.

Another call to Geoff, rising hysteria again "They've absconded! What do I do now?"

"Well, wait for them to settle and try again, if you see a little bunch of bees on the ground the queen might be with them, and if you can find her the swarm will follow."

"OK thanks, I'll have a look around" I searched for her around the box, under the tree, all to no avail. Eventually the cluster settled on a neighbour's apple tree. I phoned to ask for permission to go onto her allotment. Luckily she said yes.

By now Alan, having decided dinner can wait, has returned to provide moral and, if necessary, physical support.

We were discussing how to get the cluster down from the tree, using a step ladder, maybe having to cut the branch, but as it was quite high I was beginning to lose hope again, when suddenly Alan said "That looks like the queen down there." HE had spotted her on the ground with a bunch of bees! Thank goodness Geoff had put a white spot on her and thank goodness Alan has eagle eyes. Oh joy! I caught her in the queen clip, put her in the box, gathered a few bees and put them in the box, put the roof on very quickly, placed the white plastic sheet on the ground and waited.

After a while the bees just came down from the tree, landed on the sloping walkway I'd provided and calmly trotted up into the hive. What a wonderful sight, just like a crowd moving into a football match – only better! We left them for a couple of hours and came back and took them home for a few days, to settle them into the nuc box.

I wouldn't have done it without the lockdown, and I couldn't have done it without Geoff's hotline! It was such an exhilarating experience and watching the bees walking into the nuc was just as good as every beekeeper will tell you.

Next time, I thought, next time I'll be prepared.

Ten days later, the hive swarmed again. The first time I could put down to inexperience, but the second definitely incompetence! I was calmer, I managed to get them into a cardboard box, but I did have to give the swarm away. I felt I couldn't possibly handle another colony, as a beginner and not with the lockdown.

What a buzz though!



Red tailed bumblebee on bramble blossom.



Sedums blooming on a roof top in Chancery Lane.

Focus on Forage

Mark tells us what's in flower at this time of year, reprinted from last year.

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 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.



Foxgloves are out now.



A bumblebee on field scabious.

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.

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 usefulness 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



Honey bee on *sedum ocre*



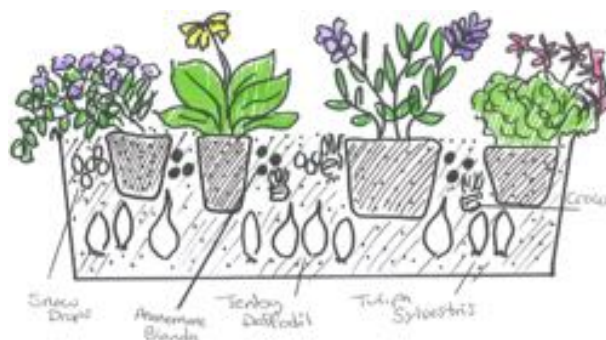
Campanula blooms

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**, **choisya**, **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 **choisya** 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 cornflower**, **wall flowers**, **escalonia**, **osteospermums**,



teucrium, **lamb's ears**, **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**, **belianthus**, **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.

Make a Bee-Friendly Window Box

Marks' bee-friendly window box instructions are on [our website](#) and he also [has a video](#). Try and share!

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

My window boxes with bees and other pollinators in mind were such a buzzing success I've decided to share

with you all how to make the perfect for pollinators window box for spring and early summer. I live in a 2nd floor apartment facing south east so my boxes receive the morning sun and lots of insects visiting all through the morning.

The key is to choose plants with simple flowers that are attractive to insects and provide pollen and nectar. The other important bit is to layer your box with plants that will flower one after another providing a long succession of flowers.

Here I have used spring bulbs of the simple species types **Tulipa sylvestris**, **Pseudo Narcissi lobularis** (Tenby Daffodil), **crocus mix**, **Anemone blanda** and single **snow drops**. These are planted at various depths according to their preference. The Snow drops and Crocus will be the first to emerge and flower in February followed by the species daffodils and Tulips in March and they are then succeeded by the Anemones which flower March to late April.

Above the bulbs I am planting a mixture of **Cowslips** (*Primula veris*), **Forget-me-nots** (*Myosotis*), **Campanula carpatica**, **Thymes**, **Saxifrage**, **Thrift Americana maritima**, **Aubrietia**, **alpine dianthus** (pinks), **Antirrhinum** and **wallflower** (*Erysimum*). For the wallflowers I recommend the alpine types or for larger window boxes go for "Bowles' Mauve" or "Orange bedder" both are very long flowering and attractive to spring pollinators.

Water regularly to keep your boxes from drying out and you'll provide forage from February through to mid summer. Once they start to look tatty, cut down seed heads and push nasturtium seeds into the compost to add colour until first frosts.

Bee Reading

Deborah tells us about her lockdown bee reading

Deborah Blythe
LBKA member

With so much more time on my hands during lockdown, I have been able to catch up on some "bee" reading. As a result I came across some very interesting articles which I thought might be of interest to the readers.

"Blooms on demand" for bumble bees

Once again Bumblebees demonstrate how resourceful they are. When pollen is scarce and plants near the nest are not yet flowering, workers have developed a

way to force them to bloom. Research published in Science shows that the insects puncture the plants' leaves, which causes them to flower, on average, 30 days earlier than they otherwise would. To find out, the team placed pollen-deprived bumblebees together with tomato and mustard plants in mesh cages. The bees soon cut several holes in the leaves of each plant using their mandibles and proboscises. As a test, the researchers tried to replicate the bumblebee damage in additional plants with forceps and a razor. Both sets of plants with injured leaves bloomed faster, but the ones punctured by the bees flowered weeks earlier than those cut by the scientists, suggesting that chemicals in the insects' saliva may be involved as well. The behaviour could be an evolutionary adaptation that lets bees forage more early. [Source: Scientific American.](#)

"Once is enough for long-term memory in honey bee"

With their tiny brains and renowned ability to memorise nectar locations, honeybees are a favorite model organism for studying learning and memory. Within a honeybee colony, there are nurses, who clean the hive and feed the young; guards, who protect the hive; and foragers, who search for nectar. Whereas previous studies have tested bees en masse, researchers focused on foragers, tasking them with remembering an experience relevant to their role: an odour associated with a sugary reward. The researchers observed that a single exposure to a reward-paired odour was enough for most forager bees to remember that specific odour the following day: they extended their proboscises when exposed to the odour but not when exposed to an unrelated scent. Many foragers could even remember the odour three days later. [Source: The Scientist.](#)

"Bees need meat"

Microbes in flowers are crucial to bee diets, and microbiome changes could be starving the insects. Fermenting microbes are present in pollen. Their function is to break down parts of pollen. Researchers have concluded that whilst honey bees have been considered wasps that have turned "vegetarian" in fact they eat enough of the microbes to make them omnivores and need them to survive. It is outside stressors such as climate change and habitat loss that affect: pollen born microbes causing them to decline and bees to starve and die. [Source: Scientific American.](#)



Frank's hive stands.

Our second ONLINE pub social in the historical surroundings of your own home. Bring your own beer. See email for a link.

Sunday 12th July: Monthly meeting: The London Bee Situation

11:00-13:00 at via Zoom (see link in email)

This month will be about the London Bee Situation. London has a high density of honey bee colonies. We will be considering the impacts of this on London, Londoners, the environment and wildlife. We will have a discussion about our online report on the issues. Bring your own coffee and cake!

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.

Frank Ryan: I make beehive stands from strong premium-grade materials, painted an attractive holly colour using bee-friendly paint. Each stand is made to measure a for comfortable working height and has the option to expand from a single stand to a double. The dimension allow for ratchet-strapping. Contact Frank on 07877388933 or frankryan60@hotmail.com.

Upcoming events

Sunday 14th June: Monthly meeting: Bee Health

11:00-13:30 via Zoom (see link in email)

This month will be about different aspects of bee health – looking for, recognising and minimising the spread of disease. We will have a panel of experienced LBKA beekeepers to talk through the topics and answer questions from the floor. As a participant, you will also have the chance to answer questions and give your perspectives. Bring your own coffee and cake!

Tuesday, 30th June: Pub Social

18:30 onwards via Zoom (see link in email)

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
- **Apiaries:** Tristram Sutton, apiaries@lbka.org.uk
- **Development:** Simon Saville, development@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Elliot Hodges, mentor@lbka.org.uk
- **Events:** Martin Hudson, events@lbka.org.uk
- **Resources:** Mark McDonnell, resources@lbka.org.uk

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

