



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

May, 2023

Swarming season is in full swing, keeping our swarm collectors busy!

A less pleasant side to beekeeping is dealing with disease. Doing a detailed disease inspection and knowing what healthy brood looks are good starts. This month's Bee Health Day will help you know what to look for and how to act. Places are limited, so you will need to sign up – members will have the email in their inbox. You can also sign up for our Improver Course on 11th June.

This month Richard reminds us of pre-COVID days when in-person meetings were more better attended than now. Thanks also to Howard for his summary (p7) of what we should be doing in the apiary, Mark's focus on forage (p7) and all the swarm photographs.

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Thank you to this month's contributors: **Rachel De-whurst, Richard Glassborow, Eugene Fahy, Howard Nichols, Mark Patterson, Simon Saville, Salvatore Scotti and Luke Whyatt.** Would you like to join these esteemed contributors? If so, contact me. Please help make the newsletter better by providing content – photos, articles, thoughts, reflections, advice, recipes, poetry...

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

From our Chair

Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk



Can you imagine how this would work on Zoom or WhatsApp?

For those who may not recognise it, this photo was taken at last year's LBKA Summer Social. Thanks to COVID-19, we have all discovered Zoom and it has transformed our lives by making it possible to benefit from some of the underlying dynamics and many of the levels of communication of a good "meeting" when circumstances prevent actually meeting. And where would we be without WhatsApp, whether for its constant con-



Spotted by Salvatore. "Back of the net!". Photo: Salvatore Scotti. Quote from Eugene Fahy.

versational babble, or timely knowledge transfer, always moving through the "NOW"?

Excellent though these technologies are, look back to the photo and ask yourself how would that work on a virtual platform. Reflect on what digital platforms cannot deliver.

They are different of course – horses for courses!

I am raising this because person to person, face to face, real meetings, call them what you will, are in danger of going on the red-list. There has been a marked fall-off in attendances since Covid. It is not just us, all associations seem to be experiencing difficulty in getting their membership to engage. And maybe it's related to the number we hear have left the workforce, not just in this country but in many. It's a social phenomenon.

This is not about trying to get back to the way things were. It matters because we are a social animal, we perform well and we learn well in social contexts (I am not making that up, it is recognised in a lot of learning theories).

It matters particularly to the LBKA because, far from wanting to get back to the way things were before Covid, we have set ourselves an agenda to review, revise and improve urban beekeeping in London and make it more sustainable. This is not a theoretical programme. It will involve a lot of hands-on skills, practical learning, experimenting, sharing and mutual support.

Our traditional monthly meetings were always intended to be a mixture of targeted educational content and informal learning through socialising. Some targeted educational content can be carried out as well on Zoom as in a face to face meeting, to a point. But it is without the informal social discourse that goes with a real meeting. And for a membership organisation, with the agenda we have, it should be obvious that discourse is as important as practical skills.

Before COVID-19, attendances at monthly meetings were usually of the order of 40 – 50. Now it is more like 4 or 5.

For the time being the executive is continuing to try to re-establish meetings, not just for the sake of having meetings but because we are going to need a higher level of engagement if we are going to succeed in turning round the London Bee Situation. If we are getting something wrong, please let us know; if there are barriers we have not recognised, please let us know, openly or privately. If it's membership apathy, we need to know that too. We all have to help find what it takes to make this work, It is not just monthly meetings. All meetings are costly and time-consuming to organise, set-up and deliver. They also need volunteers and attendees.

Coming up soon, Bee Health Day, the Lambeth Country Show, the LBKA Summer Social... use them or lose them!





Announcements

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

May's Monthly Meeting and Pub Social

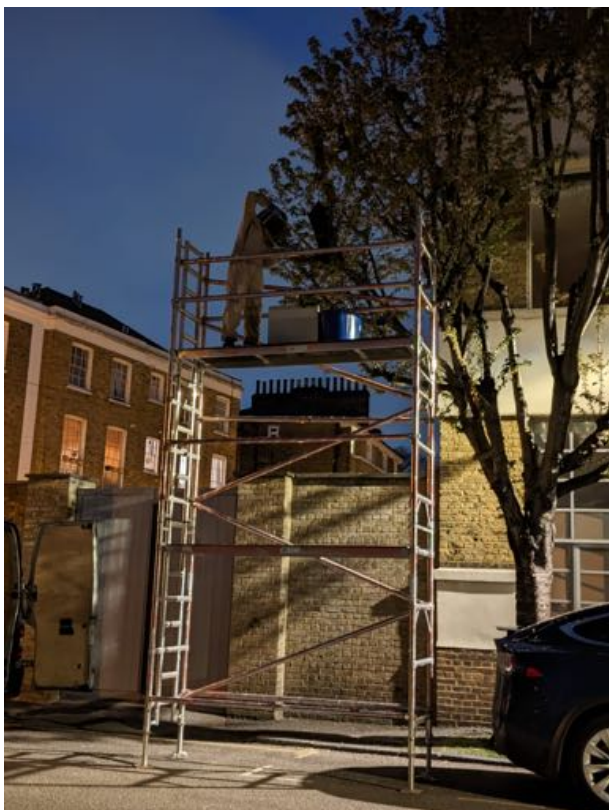
May's Monthly Meeting on **14th May** will be replaced by an all-day Bee Health Day at **Brockwell Park**. It will focus on bee health including how to inspect for disease, varroa and apiary hygiene from experts. These are very important topics with Varroa as the number-one pest and EFB being so prevalent. Booking is essential. See your email for details of how to book.

June's Monthly Meeting will be replaced with an "Improver Course". It is aimed at more advanced beekeeping, approximating to the level of skill and colony understanding required at the BBKA General Husbandry assessment level. See [3](#) for more details. It will be limited to 20 people. Booking is essential. See your email for details of how to book.

Our Pub Social will be on **30th May** at [The King's Head](#) (115 Upper St, Islington, N1 1QN) from 18:30, close to Angel (Northern Line) and Highbury & Islington (Victoria Line).

June's monthly meeting: Improver Course

The monthly meeting on Sunday 11th June will be an "Improver Course" at our Mudchute apiary and will focus on more advanced beekeeping, consisting of some theory, a practical session at the apiary, and then a round up to discuss what we have found in the colonies and what we should do. It is aimed at a level beyond the Basic and approximating to the level of skill and



Spotted by Aidan. "Swarm collector with the proper equipment". Photo and quote: Aidan Slingsby.

colony understanding required at the BBKA General Husbandry assessment level.

The course will concentrate upon handling skills and reading the colony. It will not cover swarm control, queen rearing or disease inspection. Although these are essential higher level skills they are covered elsewhere in the LBKA beekeeping calendar and education programmes. This will cover both practical and theory but concentrating upon reading the colony and handling skills.

What is an Improver? As beekeepers we should all keep our "L plates" on and learn constantly. I recently heard of a recently deceased beekeeper who started keeping bees at age 19 and even at 91 years of age said "you never stop learning about bees there is always something new to discover". I would imagine he would perceive himself as an improver despite his long experience.

My own definition would be that someone who has taken the BBKA Basic assessment is an Improver from then on.

Booking is essential – see your email for an Eventbrite link. We will need to limit numbers to 20 people.

Summer social

Our spectacular Summer Social will be on 13th August after the Monthly Meeting. Continuing a long tradition



Spotted by Rachel. "This is us collecting the swarm (and cast) three weeks ago." Photo and quote: Rachel Dewhurst.

of summer socials with excellent food from the Delica Sisters. Please put in your diaries!

Monthly meetings

This year's monthly meeting will be as follows. Note that some of them will be special meetings with practical and/or social aspects. Please put them in your diaries! As ever, see [our website for details](#) with upcoming events on our [front page](#), all events on our [events page](#) and in the [members services](#) part of the website.

- Sunday 14th May: Bee Health Day
- Sunday 11th June: Improver course
- Sunday 9th June: Honey Preparation
- Sunday 13th August: Feeding bees and **Spectacular Summer Social**
- Sunday 10th September: Monthly meeting: Winter preparation
- Sunday 8th October: Monthly meeting: Natural History of bees

Beekeeping courses

We're nearing the end of our beekeeping course, with the final 20 participants doing their practical session this weekend before embarking on their mentoring. Thanks to all who have volunteered to help in its delivery. The swarm at during the practical session last weekend added a great deal of excitement.



Spotted by Luke. Photo: Luke Whyatt.

Simon will be Biking For Butterflies

On Friday next week (19th May) I will set off on my 2nd Bike For Butterflies, having done the Land's End to John O'Groats in 2021 (raising £30k+ for Butterfly Conservation).

It is basically a solo tour from Glasgow to Oban, plus circuits of Mull, Coll and Tiree, and along the Caledonia Way cycle route to Inverness. I leave Glasgow on 19th May and should reach Inverness on 11th June. It's about 700 miles and I will be mixing B&Bs and camping. It's 45 years since I've done any cycle camping - or indeed any camping in a small tent (or solo) - so this is causing me some trepidation.

The aims are to discover the butterflies & moths of NW Scotland and to raise money for Butterfly Conservation. Target butterflies include: **Chequered Skipper**, **Marsh Fritillary**, **Pearl-bordered** and **Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries**. Target moths include: **Slender Scotch Burnet** (known on 4 sites), **Tiree Twist** (1 site), **Belted Beauty**, **Argent & Sable**, and **White-spotted Sable**.



Spotted by Luke. Photo: Luke Whyatt.

Butterfly Conservation will be promoting the ride to help the fundraising. They have created the [landing page](#). The route is [here](#).

You can donate at the [JustGiving page](#).

I will be sending Tweets (@sbsaville, and #BikeForButterflies) and [Facebook updates](#).

While individual donations are always welcome, the most helpful people can do would be to promote the ride to their own circles of contacts. That way we might hit a bigger audience of givers.

Pollinator Fund Grants – Update

The recent member's survey indicated strong support from members for LBKA to invest resources in creation of forage & habitat for pollinating insects.

Over the last 3 years LBKA has piloted a grant making scheme to support pollinator-friendly planting, creation of habitat for beneficial insects, and the education of visitors to London's open spaces.

While the Pollinator Fund has been moderately successful, we appear to have exhausted the demand for relatively small grants advertised solely through our membership base. Management of the Fund has been undertaken by a panel of Trustees and co-opted LBKA members, and the experience gained has been valuable. However, we do not feel confident in advertising to a wider public audience or significantly increasing the value of individual grants we offer – we would prefer to partner with another organisation with similar charitable objects and greater experience of grant-making,

in the hope that combining resources will deliver significantly greater outcomes without further taxing our limited human resources.

To this end we are asking members to introduce LBKA to organisations, (or people who are influential in organisations), that already have a track record in successful grant making and share at least some of LBKA's charitable objects or aspirations. Such organisations may include:

1. charitable organisations owning land in the Greater London area;
2. national conservation charities with a London branch;
3. organisations making grants for heritage/conservation work undertaken in London;

If you are able to guide us toward any organisation that might prove a suitable partner for LBKA in creating forage & habitat for pollinating insects in London, please contact treasurer@lbka.org.uk Please note: we are NOT requesting ideas about what type of organisation to approach – rather, we'd like introductions to such organisations/individuals who may already also be looking for partnering opportunities.

Further information about LBKA's Pollinator Fund in its current form is available at https://www.lbka.org.uk/pollinator_fund

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.

May's Committee meeting

Here, we keep you up to date with what the committee discusses 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

In the executive part of the meeting, we planned upcoming events: courses and monthly meetings – I won't bore you with the details.

In the Trustee part of the meeting, we discussed School Food Matters whose school visits will be carried out by members. We also talked about how to progress the London Bee Situation. The Telegraph is likely to have an article relating to this soon and Mark also gave a talk about such issues.

The leaflet is titled 'Asian Hornet' and features a prominent 'Alert!' banner. It includes a 'Species Description' section with scientific details and a photograph of the wasp. A 'Key ID Features' section compares the Asian Hornet Queen and worker to the European Hornet, highlighting differences in their abdomens and legs. A 'Similar Species' section lists the European hornet, Giant woodwasp, Hornet mimic hoverfly, and Median wasp, each with a list of distinguishing characteristics and a small photograph. The leaflet concludes with 'Field Signs' and contact information for reporting sightings.

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 ferns (furniture, plant pots), freight containers, or even 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 30 mm, workers up to 25 mm long
 Entirely dark brown or black, velvety body, with a few yellow bands
 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: 'working for honey bee prey'

Similar Species
Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*) for comparison
 • Queen up to 30mm long, worker up to 25mm long
 • Legs yellow at the ends
 • Dark brown / black abdomen with a yellow / orange band on 4th segment
 • Head dark from above, orange from front
 • Dark coloured antennae
 • Entirely black velvety thorax
 • Never active at night
European hornet (*Vespa crabro*)
 • Queen up to 35mm long, worker up to 30mm long
 • Legs brown at the ends
 • Yellow abdomen marked with brown on the upper part, not banded
 • Head yellow from above, yellow from front
 • Yellow antennae
 • Thorax black with extensive brown markings
 • May be active at night
Giant woodwasp (*Ducerus gigas*)
 • 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 (*Volucella zonaria*)
 • Abdomen has more yellow stripes than Asian hornet
 • Legs darker than Asian hornet
 • Only one pair of wings (hornets and wasps have two pairs)
 • Large, globular eyes
Median wasp (*Dolichovespula media*)
 • More extensive yellow and orange colouration on abdominal segments than 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 hollows – 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: BBKA website.

May in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

May (and June) is all about swarm control. For many of us, swarming is already an issue and currently being dealt with. Routine inspections should be made each 7 days to check for queen cells. If 2 brood boxes are used (brood and a half or double brood) then the bees often build some of their queen cells between the 2 boxes. A simple routine check may be made by lifting / tilting the upper brood chamber to inspect the bottom of the frames in the upper box. It is not necessary to remove all frames using this quick method but it is nowhere near foolproof. The only way to be entirely sure is to remove each brood frame then carefully and systematically inspect each one by shaking off the bees.

Signs of swarming. Swarm control action is only needed when 1 or more queen cells are seen. Build up of drones or drone brood is not a sign of swarm preparations. Neither is the building of queen cups unless containing larva and royal jelly.

Action to be taken. Quick but not immediate action is required. Do not feel intimidated into taking immediate action. There is time to close up the colony, think matters through and collate necessary equipment. Do not attempt to simply destroy the queen cells, as this will not remove the swarming impulse. Best solution is Artificial Swarm method but this does depend upon finding the queen. Most beekeeping textbooks cover this method.

What if the queen is not marked? If the queen is unmarked and you cannot find her then shook swarm is an option. An empty (no frames in it) spare brood box is needed. All bees on the brood frames are shaken into the empty brood box which is on the hive floor on the same site. A queen excluder is then placed above the empty brood box (now containing all the bees) and the original brood box with frames and brood is placed above the queen excluder, then crownboard and roof as usual. A couple of hours later the bees have reorganised themselves with the queen and some bees below the queen excluder and brood and some bees above the queen excluder. The 2 elements can then be separated. It is disruptive for the bees but not harmful. Again, textbooks cover this method.

Other action to be taken this month

Brood disease inspection. A specific brood disease inspection should be carried out if not already done in April. This should involve shaking all the bees from

each brood frame, one frame at a time, into the bottom of the hive and carefully checking each brood frame for signs of abnormality. As with any disease or pathogen, the sooner it is detected and a course of rectification commenced then the more the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Add supers. Add supers as necessary, adding another in advance of it being needed by the bees. A super may be required either below the queen excluder or above it at this time of year.

Get bees to draw foundation. Use May nectar flow to draw out some foundation into drawn frames.

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

Spare equipment. Make sure you have sufficient spare equipment for swarm control.

Most of all...enjoy your May month of beekeeping! The beekeeping season is fairly short and we are all fortunate to have this absorbing occupation.

Focus on Forage

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

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

Bees struggling to build up in April should now have an easier time as the spring nectar flow improves. One or two of my colonies are not doing so well this year whilst others are booming. The good weather and improved availability of forage is helping them to recover – though I will be unlikely to get a honey crop from these recovering colonies this year.

Plants important to bees this month include **Horse Chestnut** (dark red pollen), **Sycamore** (pale yellow pollen), Sorbus trees such as white beam and **Mountain Ash**, **Bird Cherry** (pictured) and **Elder**. In parks, gardens and municipal areas **Choisya**, **Cotoneaster**, **Ceanothus** and **prunus laurocerasus 'lunken'** are all shrubs visited by bees.

Herbaceous perennial plants important to bees this month include **Dandelions** which are coming to the end of their main flowering period in London, **Green Alkanet** (pictured; now at its peak), **Forget-me-nots** and **Spanish Blue bells** with their green-blue pollen.

Starting to make an appearance are the first of the summer flowers which will become much more important later in the season when the trees have ceased blooming. These include **Scabious**, **Knapweeds**, **Centurea**, **Valerian**, **thistles**, **milkweeds** and the simple flower of **umbellifers** and composite flowers.



Rowan blooms.



Bird cherry.



Ceonothus up close.



Honey bees visiting my apples.

Right now in my garden the bees are visiting my **Bowles mauve wall flowers, apple blossom, Pulmonaria and strawberries.**

As we transition from spring into early summer the flowers change guard and so do the wild bees.

Many of the early emerging solitary bees will by now have built nests, provisioned for their offspring and are beginning to die. Their offspring will emerge next March to begin the cycle again. Some are bivoltine meaning they have a second generation later in the summer but for many including the hairy footed flower bees their time for this season is coming to an end, the males now bleached grey by the sun instead of their fresh gingery blonde.

As the early *Andrena* bees and flower bees disappear, a new batch of pollinators will take over, equipped to forage on a different set of later emerging plants. Soon we'll see the yellow faced bees, wool carder bees and leaf cutters visiting the flowers in our gardens.

Jobs to do in the garden

- Dead head spring flowering bulbs
- Plant out non hardy plants such as **tomato, runner beans, cucurbits and peppers.**
- Continuous weeding
- Water if dry
- Sow biennials now to ensure you have flowering plants for next spring. These include **foxglove, honesty and echiums.**

Upcoming events

See our [website](#) for an up-to-date version



Green alkanet.

It is aimed at a level beyond the Basic and approximating to the level of skill and colony understanding required at the BBKA General Husbandry assessment level.

This will be limited to 20 members so booking will be essential. A booking link will be circulated to members.

Saturday/Sunday 10th/11th June: Lambeth Country Show

All day at Brockwell Park, Brockwell Park Gardens, London, SE24 0NG

Come to our stall at the Lambeth Country Show find out about bees and beekeeping and to buy honey and other related items.

Sunday 14th May: Monthly meeting: Bee Health Day

10:30 for 11:00-16:00 at Brockwell Park Community Greenhouses, Brockwell Park, London, SE24 9BJ.

A special all-day event at Brockwell Park (Community Greenhouses) focusing on bee health including how to inspect for disease, varroa and apiary hygiene from experts.

Very important topics with Varroa as the number-one pest and EFB being so prevalent. Booking is essential. Members will be sent details of how to book.

Tuesday 30th May: Pub social

18:30-22:30 at The King's Head, 115 Upper St, Islington, N1 1QN.

Our monthly trip to the pub will be at The King's Head, 115 Upper St, Islington, N1 1QN. Close to Angel (Northern Line) and Highbury & Islington (Victoria Line).

Sunday 11th June: Monthly meeting: Improver course

11:00-14:00 at Mudchute Park and Farm, Pier St, London, E14 3HP (limited to 20 booked members)

An "Improver Course" that will consist theory, a practical session at the apiary and then a round up to discuss what we have found in the colonies and what we should do.

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:** Simon Saville, admin@lbka.org.uk
- **Education:** Howard Nichols education@lbka.org.uk
- **Membership:** Aidan Slingsby, services@lbka.org.uk
- **Events:** Annie McGeoch, events@lbka.org.uk
- **Apiaries:** Tristram Sutton, apiaries@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Elliot Hodges, mentor@lbka.org.uk
- **Resources:** Will Fry, resources@lbka.org.uk
- Stuart Kennon, stuart.kennon@lbka.org.uk

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

