



The London Beekeepers' Association LBKA News

March, 2024

Spring is coming. Sunday's monthly meeting will be the last of the trio of Asian hornet meetings to help set us up for the year ahead. It will be run by Luke and Sharon.

Please take the training opportunities we provide. We're taking bookings for our [Introduction to Beekeeping](#) course. Please help promote the course and contact us if you can help us on the day. Also, see the Announcements section about the help we give for the BBKA Basic Assessment.

In the newsletter this month, there's Richard's "From the Chair", Howard's advice what to do in the apiary at this time of year (p5) and how to approach the First Inspection, and Mark's excellent series about forage (p6).

From our Chair	1
Announcements	2
March's Committee meeting	4
March in the Apiary	5
First Inspection	6
Focus on Forage	6
Upcoming events	8
Trustees	9

Thank you to this month's contributors: Richard Glassborow, Howard Nichols, Annie McGeoch, Mark Patterson and Luke Wyatt. Would you like to join these esteemed contributors? If so, contact me.

Please help make the newsletter better by providing content – photos, articles, reflections, advice, recipes...

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

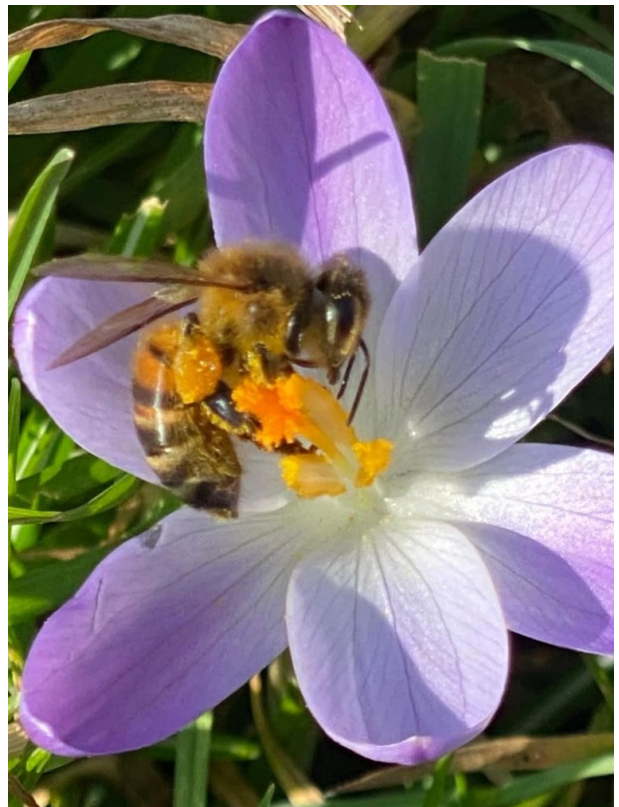
From our Chair

Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk

At the last LBKA Pub Social small but select group of LBKA members enjoying the remaining days of rest before the 2024 bee season kicks off, reflected on the potential gist of what the 2024 season may bring.

Not surprisingly, Asian hornet was right up there as something likely to feature. Anybody who has ever played any sport, particularly team sport, may recognise that moment when training turns to real life as you size up the opposition in the flesh just before the encounter. But sport is managed and, hopefully, you at least believe you have a chance of winning.

There are few game rules we can play by when it comes to an invasive alien species: particularly a predator species like Asian hornet. This is a game changer even though it is far from a game. It is not a war either. It is a biological event that we have to learn to live with.



Bee on crocus. Source: Luke Whyatt.

Learning to live with a problem is not capitulation, or appeasement. Neither is it fighting on the beaches. We know beekeeping in the UK will be hit just as hard as it has been on the continent. But beekeeping will continue. Many beekeepers will no doubt stop, as they did after *Varroa destructor* arrived in the UK in 1992. But many will continue.

So why are we apparently trying to stop the advance of the inevitable?

Back in the pub we did some back-of-an-envelope maths on the do-nothing approach. At the end of an Asian hornet seasonal cycle a single nest can release around 500 queens. Of these about 15% will go on to found a new colony the following spring. That is to say, from 1 nest in year 1 there will be 75 nests in year 2. If nothing moderates this pattern, in year 3 there will be 5,625 nests.

If we are to learn to swim in the sea it will be easier in a swell than a surf!

In the natural course of events, what ultimately moderates predator populations is prey populations. The predator runs out of food!

It seems that in the case of invasive alien predators the population dynamics can be difficult to predict because both predator and prey tend to undergo accelerated behavioural change (evolution).

In this volatile ecological state, as beekeepers try to intervene on behalf of honey bees, it is going to be very important to remember that honey bees are far from the only prey of Asian hornet. History tells us that *H. sapiens* does not have a good track record when intervening with complex ecosystems to protect its own interests. That is essentially how we have ended up with a biodiversity crisis.

I very much hope that as the LBKA engages with this challenge we will deploy and further develop our emerging principles and practices for ecological sustainability. Our opposition to kill traps was a good start. Let's not drop our guard, otherwise, we could end up effectively amplifying the damage the Asian hornet is doing to the natural world.

Announcements

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

March's Monthly Meeting and Pub Social

March's Monthly Meeting meeting will be on **Sunday (10th March)** at Battersea Children's Zoo. This will be the last of our AH workshops/lectures, but we will be



on hand to answer your queries throughout the season. We will be distributing Gardapis Sentinel traps for those that have ordered at a reduced rate and may have a few spare. We will be discussing how we can get your bees fit to fight the Asian hornet and briefly recapping the previous meetings.

The **Pub Social** will be at the [The Somers Town Coffee House](#), 60 Chalton St, London NW1 1HS on 26th March.

April's Monthly Meeting will be at an apiary on **14th April** on a topic to be confirmed.

Introduction to Beekeeping

We are taking bookings for our flagship **Introduction to Beekeeping** course at <https://www.lbka.org.uk/courses.html>. Please spread the word! Please also contact us if you'd like to help with the course.



2024 BBKA Basic Assessment

If you keep bees, we encourage you to take the BBKA basic assessment. You need to have kept bees for a minimum period of 1 year and be a BBKA member. It is fairly straightforward and the syllabus can be downloaded free of charge from the BBKA website. Follow the dropdown menu for “Members” then “examinations and assessments”. The cost is £20 and entry forms can also be downloaded at the same time. There is no need to pay the BBKA entry fee at this stage.

If you're interested please email to education@lbka.org.uk. Even if you have been keeping bees for several years but not previously taken the assessment then please do seriously consider taking it in 2024. It is well worth the effort. We will run a revision course in the spring for members wishing to take the examination. This is likely to last for 3 evenings (2 hours per evening) in early April. The assessment is both practical and simple oral questions. It lasts about 1 hour. We cover the theory on the revision nights and, for those wanting it, also offer a practical session at an apiary beforehand.

Asian Hornet Roadshow

Annie McGeoch

The first outing for the LBKA Asian Hornet Roadshow was on Saturday at St Pauls Cathedral's Messy Environmental Cathedral Morning. They had ticketed over 1000 people. It certainly felt like we had spoken to most of them – I lost my voice.

There were a lot of British Asian people in the crowd and it felt uncomfortable calling the hornets “Asian” so we called them “yellow legged”. Roughly a third had already heard of yellow legged hornets which was encouraging. We gave out Beecraft business card sized AH ID cards which people put in their wallets. We gave out laminated posters for people to pin on posts in allotments, village halls and wherever public go. The banners were read and questions asked. An 8 year old suggested non toxic impermanent yellow legged hornet tattoos “to engage the children”. A young marketing person already! Jersey BKA have a sheet with an AH to colour-in while adults talk. Maybe we do that next time.

I didn't have an LBKA member volunteer helpers, so a young Australian friend came too. Next time we need beekeepers the more the merrier to talk to the public. The attendees were from all over UK and the world as many tourists too. The strategy is to educate the public to recognise yellow legged hornets, photograph and identify. Having the nest on the banner was useful so they can be spotted too. The LBKA banners and resources are available for your local Sunday market, school functions, country fair so contact events@lbka.org.uk if want to host the roadshow.

See “members’ area” for members’ goodies

LBKA members can log in via the members’ area on the website and see videos of past talks and meetings

Old announcements from February

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

Luke Whyatt has just become a BBKA Trustee.

Luke Whyatt has been elected to BBKA as a Trustee. Amongst his many duties, he is to Chair the Asian Hornet Committee and also he will be the BBKA London representative.


Spare hives. Someone in Kilburn is no longer able to look after his hives and is looking for someone to donate them to. If you're interested, please contact Simon on admin@lbka.org.uk.

Old announcements from January

Beekeeping opportunity. St Patrick's Church, Wapping is seeking a lead person of BBKA Basic competence, or higher, for its 3-hive apiary located in the adjacent yard/garden, to succeed the current lead, hoping to retire before the commencement of the 2024 season. If interested, for details please contact Len Mole on 07715564569.

Old announcements from November/December

New trustees. The Trustees and committee comprise Richard Glassborow (Chair), Simon Saville (Sec-



Produced by Lucy Cornwell, Olaf Booy (NNSS), Gay Marris, Mike Brown (National Bee Unit) with assistance from Colette O'Flynn (National Biodiversity Data Centre Ireland) Stuart Roberts (BWFARS)

www.nonnativespecies.org

Asian Hornet

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 tipped 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 in/on 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 alernnonnative@ceh.ac.uk.



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

Key ID Features

Asian Hornet Queen

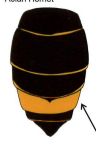
Queens up to 30 mm, workers up to 25 mm long

Entirely dark brown or black velvety body, bordered with a fine yellow band


Legs brown with characteristic yellow ends

Photos from: J. Haxaire, Rachel Scopes and Nigel Jones; Richard Ball


Asian Hornet



European Hornet








Asian Hornet abdomen is almost entirely dark except for 4th abdominal segment.




Asian hornet "hawking" for honey bee prey

Similar Species

<p>Asian hornet (<i>Vespa velutina</i>) for comparison</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<p>Actual size</p>  <p><small>Q. Rome</small></p>
<p>European hornet (<i>Vespa crabro</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<p>Actual size</p>  <p><small>Roger Burgess, Mike Stanger, National Bee Unit</small></p>
<p>Giant woodwasp (<i>Urocerus gigas</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<p>Actual size</p>  <p><small>Q. Rome</small></p>
<p>Hornet mimic hoverfly (<i>Volucella zonaria</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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 	<p>Actual size</p>  <p><small>Didier Descouens, Alan Morgan</small></p>
<p>Median wasp (<i>Dolichovespula media</i>)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> More extensive yellow and orange colouration on abdominal segments than Asian hornet Yellow markings on thorax unlike Asian hornet 	<p>Actual size</p>  <p><small>Q. Rome</small></p>

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.nationalbeequit.com

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

retary), David Hankins (Treasurer), Aidan Slingsby (Membership), Howard Nichols (Education), Tristram Sutton (Apiaries), Will Fry (Resources), Elliot Hodges (Mentoring), Annie McGeoch (Events), Stuart Kenon (trustee only) and Sharon Bassey (Asian Hornet).

Congratulations. Congratulations to Lucie Chaume-ton for passing Modules 6 and 8 and obtaining an Ad-vanced Theory Certificate, Adam Armstrong for passing Module 3 on pests, disease and poisoning, us for get-ting second place in the “Newsletter” category at the National Honey Show and Adam Armstrong (again) for winning four prizes at the National Honey Show.

Consider joining Cambridge, Somerset and Kent Beekeeping Associations. Annie is an associate member of Cambridge, Somerset and Kent BKAs. She enjoys the excellent talks and other activities they put on and thinks their £7 membership fee is great value.

LBKA book lending library. We now have a library and librarian! See members’ area of the website at <https://lbka.org.uk/library>.

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.

March’s Committee meeting

Here, we keep you up to date with what the commit-tee 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

The Asian Hornet sub-committee reported on its progress. They are making progress with finding so-lutions recording when traps are being placed and will make a recommendation about apps and communica-tion for approval by LBKA Committee. Sharon will be leading the Monthly Meeting on “getting your bees fit to fight, and actions in the apiary”. We have ordered 40 traps for use in our apiaries and for selling to mem-bers at cost price with clear instructions on use and reporting. We will also order bait (Trappit) for our apiaries and to sell to members at cost price or free if used on behalf of the association. Annie has some more Asian Hornet roadshows planned but needs volunteers to help.

Asian Hornet Identification leaflet. Source: BBKA website.

The accounts have been changed by an independent author. They were approved and will be sent to the Charity Commission. The budget for this year was approved. The new Reserves Policy was presented

BBKA are donating one tree per association to mark 150 years. LBKA will accept a tree but will make a comment about avoiding tokenism.

The calendar of events has been approved. The Introduction Courses are poorly subscribed so far so we need to promote it more widely.

March in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

March is a time of increasing activity within the hive but it all depends upon the weather. For the beekeeper it is also a month of increasing anticipation. At the time of writing it is still very cold and (as usual) rainy but assuming the weather improves then the colony at the end of March should be a substantially different entity from the one at the beginning. The intervening days can include warm, sunny days, which encourage plants to flower early, and bees to forage. The weather can just as easily revert back to cold. The former causes the bees to produce more brood and the latter to retreat back to a cluster.

The main job of the beekeeper is still to keep an eye on stores. Old "winter" bees are starting to die off and new bees are being born. Food reserves are decreasing but demand for food will substantially increase. The bees will be using energy flying on warmer days but mainly bringing in pollen, not nectar. They also need to keep the brood at a higher temperature (about 35°C) which also uses more energy. Stores can quickly be depleted in March and early April.

The first warm day from the start of March is an opportunity to have a quick look inside the hive. If so, then this will constitute the 1st inspection of the new season. The new colony card should be made up and inspection details recorded. Minimum temperature should be 10°C for a quick look but without taking out brood frames. If there is an exceptionally warm day with the temperature 14°C or more then a detailed colony inspection may be made. Otherwise, better to leave this until April.

If an inspection is not possible, then observing the colony entrance will provide invaluable information. If the bees are bringing in pollen, purposefully entering and leaving (flying a beeline) then these are always good

signs. If the bees are aimless, listless or without purpose on a warm day then all may not be well.

Monitoring varroa mites. This is a good time to monitor the mite drop. Leave the inserts in for a week and count the mite drop. If >2 mites per day then some action will be needed in Spring. If >7 mites per day then action is immediately required. The National Bee Unit produces an excellent booklet "Managing Varroa" which is available for free download. There is also comprehensive information about varroa on the NBU website, including an on line varroa count calculator. www.nationalbeeunit.com

Siting your bees. Those who were on the LBKA mentoring schemes last year and have not yet acquired bees (but will do so) should prepare the hive and site. If acquiring bees by means of the purchase of a nucleus from a supplier then the order should have been placed by now. Demand often exceeds supply.

Formulate a beekeeping plan for the season. This need not be elaborate and may be such as improving swarm control, attempting a new manipulation, maximising honey production (ensuring there is the maximum number of flying bees in the colony when the honey flow starts), etc. The opportunities are endless but it is good to have a basic plan and to use this to increase beekeeper learning.

Finally, on a sad note, if you find your bees have died out then it is imperative to close the entrance to prevent robbing. Make a note of what you observe then remove and destroy dead bees and frames. Sterilise the hive parts. It is important to try to find out why the bees have died. Winter and early spring colony losses seem to average 20% to 30% so you are not alone. It does not always mean it's the beekeeper's fault but it is essential to analyse and learn. Examples of reasons include, but are not limited to, the varroa mite (the number 1 offender), lack of stores, damp / inadequate hive ventilation, site situated in a frost pocket, failing queen, poorly mated queen.

On a more optimistic note, the beekeeping season arrives in March. We have several eventful months ahead. I sincerely hope that all of us have a productive season and achieve whatever aims and goals we aspire to!

First Inspection

Notes for the first inspection of the season.

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

Before first inspection of the season then, in advance, the beekeeper should have:

- Checked beesuit (no holes)
- Overhauled smoker from last season.
- Have adequate supply of smoker fuel and disposable gloves for the season

The temperature should not be below 14°C (shirt sleeves weather) with bees flying and bringing in pollen.

Have no idea what we may find. Hopefully all is well but, inter alia, we could find:

- Dead colony
- Drone laying queen
- No queen
- 2 queens (due to “perfect supersedure in the Autumn)
- An unmarked queen when there was a marked queen in the Autumn
- Frames with mouldy pollen (these are useless and need to be removed at a subsequent inspection)
- Old black frames or with an excess of drone cells (also to be subsequently removed)
- Low on stores.

The objective of 1st inspection is simply to assess the condition of the colony and undertaken as follows.

Observe the colony entrance:

- Are bees purposely flying or aimlessly flying?
- Are they bringing in pollen?

Gently smoke the entrance and wait a couple of minutes for it to take effect. Remove roof and place upside down in front of hive. Gently remove crownboard. (likely to be propolised), then the dummy board.

With the bees gently smoked and the colony prepared for inspection then examine each frame in turn. Every time a colony is opened you should ask the same 5 questions and 1st inspection of the year is no different: These should be committed to memory.

1. Has the colony sufficient room?
2. Has the colony sufficient stores until the next inspection?
3. Is there evidence of a laying queen?
4. Are there signs of disease or abnormality?
5. Is the colony building up (brood in all stages on several frames)?

At this first inspection the state of the frames should also be examined. If they are old, have an excess of drone cells or pollen mould then they can be moved towards the flanks ready for removal at a later date. (The bees will not draw out foundation at this stage of the season as it is too cold).

Close up colony, checking that everything is secure.

Finally, make the 1st entry of the season on the new colony record card.

Focus on Forage

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

March is officially the first month of spring for us in the UK, but it's pretty wet and cold recently. The first of the spring flowers are already putting on a colourful show of yellows, purples and shades of white. **Snowdrops** are starting to pass their best, having flowered in large numbers since late January. The early flowering **crocus** species are currently looking at their best across most of London. The later flowering large flowered crocus varieties are just starting to join the display too. These and other spring bulbous plants include **Winter Aconite**, **Anemone blanda**, **Squill** and **Muscari**. These are valuable early sources of pollen for bees.

Garden plants important to bees this month include the **Hellebores** (the hybrid Hellebores in my garden are particularly popular with bees at the moment), **Pulmonaria** and **Wallflowers**. Both the biennial bedding wallflowers and short lived perennial varieties are attractive to bees, but it's the Everlasting Wallflower *Bowles Mauve* that is flowering best at present; the others will put on a fantastic show towards the end of March and into April.

Several Spring flowering trees are important to bees and these include **White Poplar**, **Willow**, and **Hazel**. The large Hazel tree in my apiary has been flowering since January but is at its peak now. The willow and **white beam** catkins are just starting to open. One of the best small willows for gardens is **Salix caprea Kilmarnock** which is a pussy willow type with large fluffy catkins which become covered in bright lemon yellow pollen. All manner of bees adore it. Last spring whilst cycling through Archbishops Park *en route* to the LBKA monthly meeting, I passed a trio of these dwarf weeping trees which were covered in **honey bees**, **Ashy Mining bees**, **Painted Mining bees** and several **bumblebees**. These trees all have pollen with a high protein and fatty acids content valuable to bees rearing brood and for queens fattening up ready to begin laying.



Primrose.



Buff tailed queen on crocus.



Winter aconite.



Honey bee on crocus.



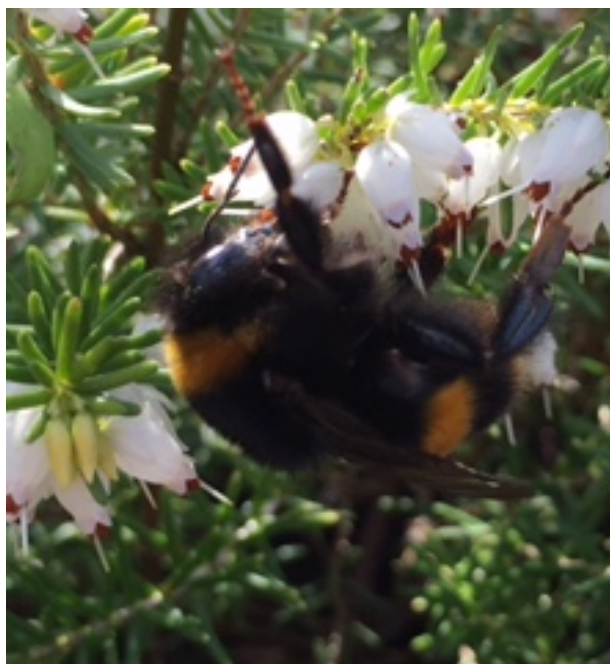
Wild damson.

Shrubs flowering this month attractive to bees include **flowering currant**, **Sarcococca**, **blackthorn**, **flowering quince** and **camelia**. At last month's RHS early Spring Flower Show I bought 2 new camelias for my garden, a light pink one and a dark pinkie red one called "Adeyaka". Both are open single flowered varieties which flower from Late February through to Early May and are "self cleaning" varieties which mean the blooms drop as soon as they are pollinated, or if the blooms become frosted resulting in a neat looking shrub without the tainted frost damaged petals which can look unsightly.

Other flowers making an appearance include **lesser celandine**, **sweet violet**, **cowslip**, **primrose**, **white deadnettle**, **bugle**, **ground ivy** and the first of the **Spanish bluebells** (*Hyacinthoides Hispanica*) whose blue-green pollen Honey bees will collect. white dead-nettle in particular is a valuable wild plant for bumble bees and some of the longer-tongued solitary bees. Its pollen is rich in protein and fats.

Jobs in the garden

This time of year presents us with the last opportunity to lift and divide herbaceous perennials before they start to put on significant growth. I've just lifted and split my



Buff tailed queen on winter heather.

Helleniums, hardy geraniums, Japanese anemones and sedum spectabile.

Plant out herbaceous perennials that were grown from seed or cuttings last year. Get them in the ground now so they have time to spread out their roots ahead of the coming growing season. Less hardy plants may still require protection with fleece. Have fleece available to protect the blooms of soft fruits. My **peach** and **nectarine** buds are starting to open – will I get any fruit this year?

Early March is the last opportunity to prune apples and pears. Stone fruits such as peach, plum and apricot should be pruned in late summer. When pruning apples and pear resist the urge to cut back too much growth which the trees respond to by putting on excess vigorous regrowth. Unlike plum and other stone fruits which flower on the previous year's wood, Pip fruits require 2 year old material to develop flower/fruit buds.

Upcoming events

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

**Sunday 10th March: Monthly meeting:
Asian Hornet**

11:00-13:00 at Battersea Park Children's Zoo, Battersea Park, London, SW11 4NJ (meet at the main entrance)

Sunday's meeting will be the last of our AH workshops/lectures, but we will be on hand to answer your queries throughout the season. We will be distributing

Gardapis Sentinel traps for those that have ordered at a reduced rate and may have a few spare. We will be discussing how we can get your bees fit to fight the Asian hornet and briefly recapping the previous meetings.

Tuesday 26th March: Pub social

18:30-22:30 at The Somers Town Coffee House, 60 Chalton St, London NW1 1HS.

Our monthly trip to the pub will be at The Somers Town Coffee House, 60 Chalton St, London NW1 1HS.

**Friday 12th - Sunday 14th April:
BBKA Spring Convention**

All day at Harper Adams University, Edgmond, Newport, Shropshire, TF10 8NB.

The 150 anniversary conference with lectures, Workshops, Seminars and Trade Show. More details at <http://www.bbka.org.uk/springconvention>.

**Sunday 14th April: Monthly meeting:
Swarm control (to be confirmed)**

11:00-13:00 at To be confirmed.

Details to be confirmed.

Trustees

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
- **Asian Hornet:** Sharon Bassey, asianhornet@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.

