LBKA NEWS

LBKA HIVES UPDATE

Stockwell & Eden

Important news about Stockwell and Eden teaching apiaries is that they are about to be merged. Stockwell Studios have been bought by developers and planning has been granted to develop the site. Since this may begin this summer we have decided to move the bees now. But, if all goes well, a garden will remain and Art4Space are keen for us to return when things have quietened down.

In the meantime, we have all been anxious about our bees in this endless winter. But on my most recent visit to the Stockwell apiary it was immediately apparent that all was still well.

It was the beginning of April and although the temperature was still in single figures and a cold wind was blowing the sun was shining and the bees were flying from all three colonies. This was gratifying as all three were swarm colonies last year and there was uncertainty over how well the queens were mated. But we did know at the end of December, when we administered the oxalic acid treatment, that the number of bees in each was fairly substantial. This will be in part because the varroa count was reasonable by the end of the summer but perhaps also a vindication for our policy of not being greedy – in addition to supplies on the brood frames we had left at least 1 super of honey on each and one had a second brood box full of stores.

But of course, lots of bees need lots of supplies so we have now started providing fondant. If the cold weather persists this will be the danger time. I am looking forward to a few more degrees and the first inspection – not least because over the last six to eight weeks of the autumn one of these colonies had two queens!

The three colonies at the Eden apiary have also survived so far but they are nowhere near as strong. These were newly developed quite late in the summer and it was always doubtful they had accumulated enough supplies for the winter. They have had fondant throughout but it has sometimes been too cold to risk lifting the crown board to see if it needs rotating to keep the fondant above the cluster. I did take that risk at the beginning of April and they are all still surviving but two of the colonies are dangerously small. Interestingly it is the nucleus hive that is strongest.

Richard Glassborow, Apiary manager

LBKA HIVES UPDATE

Brockwell Park

Our bees are in a good sheltered spot at the top of the hill, in the walled garden of Brockwell Community Greenhouses (BCG) near the tennis courts. BCG had been wanting us to move the bees, but are now saying we are we can stay where we are for now. All the colonies were treated with oxalic acid between Christmas and New Year and a zip lock bag of fondant placed above the crown boards, just in case they needed it.

We went into winter with 3 live colonies, 2 big and one medium sized. One colony has died, having dwindled to almost nothing and then dying of isolation starvation (We could tell because they had no stores close to them and had their heads buried in the cells.) The cluster was too small to travel to the stores, of which there were plenty.

Unfortunately we were expecting to lose one of more of the hives after the bee inspector told us at the end of the summer that the spotty brood and discoloured larvae we could see were probably caused by viral infections linked to a very bad varroa infection. Whilst we were relieved it wasn't foulbrood, we have been on tenterhooks all winter because he said there was only a 50:50 chance they would survive. The frames from the colony that died have all been burned and the boxes scorched and scraped ready for more bees in the spring. The other two colonies are quite small, so might not make it either, but we're keeping our fingers crossed.

The Nucs

At the end of the Summer the small cast swarms were combined so that the nuc boxes were all full of bees. The bee inspector was called out to look at all the bees and found the same issue with the two nucs that had come from Brockwell and suggested that they were destroyed because of the amount of dead brood. We decided to destroy the colony that was tiny and was being robbed despite having a restricted entrance, but to move the other colony out of the apiary so that it would have a chance. It was too small and sickly and died anyway.

All the other bees were well. They've been treated with thymol in the autumn and with oxalic acid after Christmas and have had fondant topped up on them every two weeks over winter. There are 9 colonies (but one is small and probably won't survive) that we will be selling at the end of April, or whenever the daytime temperature reaches 16°C, so that we can properly check them. Since swarms bring the risk of disease to the apiary, Karin has moved her own hives from her allotment ready for this season's LBKA swarms to be brought in. The nucs are mostly earmarked for people, but we will probably be getting swarms in again from late May, so if members are looking for nucs, please contact Liz Gill. lizcgill@btinternet.com

Karin Courtman, LBKA Chair

APRIL IN THE APIARY

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

The usual situation in April is that colony populations are substantially increasing and drones starting to appear. There should normally be sufficient available forage for the bees to be self-sufficient if the weather holds good. This is far from reality at the time of writing at the end of March. The most important job for the beekeeper this April, given the weather, is to ensure that the colony is not starving. If it is still too cold for a proper inspection and if in doubt then feed. See Karin's article 'Feeding Bees in Spring' for more advice.

Assuming that the cold snap will come to an end and that the weather will pick up then other action to be taken this month normally includes the following:

- **Remove mouseguards** and replace with a clean, sterilised entrance block.
- **If the queen is unmarked** then this is an ideal time to find and mark her. The colony is now going to continue to expand in numbers up until July whereupon it will start to contract. Swarm control will be considerably easier with a marked queen.
- **Colony build up**. Is the colony continuing to build up? A significant benefit of keeping colony records is that the number of frames of brood is recorded.
- **Varroa mites**. Check mite drop if not already done in March.

If not done in March then the 1st full inspection and spring cleaning of the hive should be carried out. From then on regular inspections should be made. When inspecting a colony, 5 questions should be asked and actions taken if appropriate.

Is the queen present and laying?
You do not need to find the queen. If there are eggs or newly hatched larvae then this is evidence that she was in the hive and laying 3 or 4 days ago.

Has the colony enough room?
This is a 2-part question, being enough room for the queen to continue to lay eggs and enough room for the colony to store nectar. If not then provide room by adding a super.

Are there any queen cells?
Queen cups are to be expected and should normally be ignored unless containing an egg or larva. Queen cells require swarm control action by the beekeeper. If the bees have sufficient space then swarm control should not normally be an issue until May. If there is insufficient space in the hive, leading to congestion and inhibition of the circulation of queen substance, then swarming can be an April problem. Therefore, ensure that the colony has sufficient space. Add a super if necessary.

Are there signs of disease?
This is a comprehensive question but the strategy is best approached by being familiar with healthy brood. Anything that does not fit this description is, prima facie, suspicious. Healthy unsealed brood is pearly white in colour, evenly laid and lies in a "C" shape in the cell. Healthy sealed brood is light brown in colour, evenly laid and with slightly raised dome cappings.

Are there enough stores until the next inspection?
The equivalent of 2 full National brood frames is regarded as more than sufficient at this time of year, even if there is a serious and prolonged downward turn in the weather. Nectar does not usually rise in the UK until the temperature reaches 18C. So, beware of low stores. **Howard Nichols, LBKA Education**

FEEDING BEES IN THE SPRING

Will my bees survive? Is there anything I can do to help then during this bad weather? Have they run out of honey? We've all been hoping that this bad weather will break and that soon our bees will be able to fly liberally, collecting nectar and pollen. Recently it has generally been too cold for bees to fly (and too cold for most flowers to make nectar), so foraging opportunities have been seriously reduced. FERA has issued a starvation warning.

When it is too cold to open the hive (i.e. it is below 14° C) the easiest way to ensure that the bees will have a source of calories is to feed the bees sugar fondant or Ambrosia patties. Fondant is the white, semi-runny icing commonly seen on top of iced finger buns. This can be bought (usually in 15kg packs) from bakers Just tell them that it is for bees and not for catering. Ambrosia is available from beekeeping suppliers. It looks like fondant icing, but it contains about 80% simple sugars, which may make it easier for the bees to digest than the disaccharide sucrose in the fondant. The fondant works out a lot cheaper, but it is not possible to buy it in the small quantities most beekeepers want.

If the cluster of bees is below a hole in the crownboard the fondant or Ambrosia can be placed on the hole for the bees to access. The bees struggle to eat it if it dries out, so it is recommended that the patties are placed in a plastic bag or wrapped in cling film, with a hole cut in it below, to allow the bees access. The colony may eat 500g of this sugar a week.

In cold weather it is best not to feed bees syrup, as this is more work for them, and in the cold, they will not go into most types of feeder.

It causes bees a great deal of stress if the crownboard is removed when it is cold and windy and is best avoided as stress accelerates the progress of diseases such as Nosema. In emergencies however, for example if the bees are lethargic or there are already dead bees showing signs of death through starvation with their heads buried in the cells, it is best to place the sugar pattie without any covering directly on top of the top bars. The easiest way to get the pattie to 9mm thick so that it will fit in the beespace is to roll it out at home and then transport it to the apiary between greaseproof paper. Alternatively you can roll the pattie between your fingers to make long thin sausages that you place on the gaps between the frames. Keep the crownboard on as much as possible. This should stop the bees starving, but remember, that you will need to go back in a week to check them, as this will not last long.

Bees need pollen as well as sugar if they are to thrive and multiply. The protein and fats the colony needs comes from pollen. The queen needs a high protein diet to produce eggs and the growing larvae need lots of brood food, which has a high protein content, if they are to grow. Insufficient pollen will slow colony build up. In a pollen dearth the bees particularly welcome a pack of either pollen supplement (e.g. Neopoll) or pollen substitute (e.g. Nektarpoll).

In London our main nectar flows tend to be late Spring and early Summer. If we want a good honey crop, we need to have the colony as big as possible by mid May. It takes 6 weeks from egg to becoming a forager bee, so if we want big colonies by then, they need a source of protein now. In most years they have already been bringing in pollen for weeks by now. Not this year. Whilst they are certainly better than nothing, the available pollen substitutes and supplements do not actually contain much pollen or protein. They are mostly sugar. So this year for the first time I have made my own pollen substitute patties from dates, sugar, soya flour and dried brewers yeast. The recipe is from a very experienced and successful beekeeper. I'll let you know if I think they do any good or not.

Karin Coutman, LBKA Chair

APRIL IN THE FORAGE PATCH

The prolonged cold wintry weather has delayed many of London's flowers from making their normal early spring appearance. It also means that there is currently not much around for our bees to forage on when they do get a brief break in the weather.

As we enter April many early flowers such as the Crocus and hellebores are past their best and true winter flowers such as Mahonia and snow drops have just about all stopped flowering. The very cold snap has meant the later spring flowers are delayed in emerging. Once the cold snap is over (predicted to be mid April) these flowers will quickly burst into flower and our bees desperate for fresh pollen and stores of nectar will be out looking for them.

In some areas Alder and Hazel Catkins may still be in flower and provide pollen for bees on mild days, though the ones in my allotment are now well over. Shortly we should start to see willow flowering, pears and early Apples. Willow pollen is great brood food for larvae whilst orchard fruit trees produces highly nutritious nectar. In some areas Plums and Damson's may be already flowering along with Crab Apple.

Viburnum Tinus will continue to flower well into April and is one of the earliest sources of nectar. Other shrubs coming into flower in April are flowering Currant, some varieties of Hebe and in warm areas Rosemary may be flowering. Spring bulbs emerging this month such as Hyacinths and Squill are good sources of forage for Honey Bees. Whilst Daffodils are in flower now they are of little use to Honey bees.

Herbaceous plants emerging this month include Primrose and Pulmonaria, both of which may be visited by Honey bees but are particularly attractive to longer tongued bees such as the hairy Footed Flower bee which usually makes an appearance this time of year and are almost all gone by June.

Wood Anenemone and the blue flowered garden cultivars of Anenemone blanda are starting to flower. These plants are a prolific source of pollen for honey bees. Bowles mauve wall flower is a staple forage plant at this time of year and is also attractive to butterflies. Other plants making an appearance in April are forget-me-not, Dandelion and marsh marigold - all popular with Honey bees.

The Easter bank holiday is traditionally the busiest gardening weekend of the year with many garden centres and DIY stores having 20% off sales. This is a good opportunity to get out and buy some flowers for the garden and a good time to plant them so they have all spring to establish and produce long lasting displays in Summer and autumn. Its also the perfect time to sow your LBKA pollinator friendly flower seeds so stop by the website and buy a packet.

Mark Patterson, LBKA Forage Officer

Anenemone Blanda

Marsh Marigold

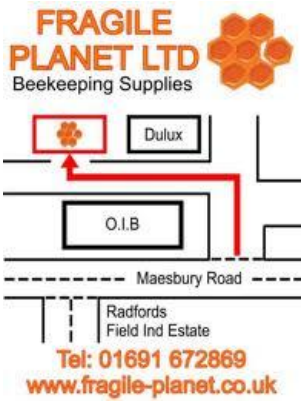
Dandelion

MEMBER DISCOUNTS

Thornes Equipment from Thornes Agents:

- Barnaby Shaw 5% discount contact shawbarnaby@hotmail.com
- Discounts of up to 20% on Thornes equipment via Sharon Bassey sharonbassey@hotmail.com

Discounts of 10% on **Fragile Planet** and a range of discounts from **French Flint** (jar suppliers) for those members asking for codes from Angela Woods admin@lbka.org.uk



DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

LBKA Monthly Meeting: Sunday 14th April

It feels as if Spring is here. Come to the monthly meeting to catch up, ask advice, share tips and experiences and prepare for the season ahead.

11am at Fairley House Junior School, 220 Lambeth Rd, London SE1 7JY

Many thanks to Karin Courtman, Richard Glassborow, Howard Nichols and Mark Patterson for all their contributions this month