The London Beekeepers' Association
LBKA News

May, 2015

Welcome to May's newsletter and a special welcome to all new members who have (or will) attend our beekeeping courses. The final course we plan to run this year is this weekend. New member and course attendee Laura, has a nice write-up of April's course on page 10. In addition to the usual regular features (thanks to those reliable people who write them), Mark has another travelogue of a trip to Gibraltar he did a couple of years ago on page 14. There's also exciting news about a possible apiary at Holland Park to help serve members in West London. And Emily has found things a bit frantic recently.

Thanks to all this month's contributors: Richard Glassborow, Petros Hahladakis, Cerys Harrow, Martin Hudson (proofreading), Howard Nichols, Mark Patterson, Laura Jean Sargent, Emily Scott and Vesko Starchikov.

We're always looking for new and interesting contributions – please contact me if you're interested.

Aidan Slingsby
Editor
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From our Chair

Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk

Last month saw an interesting potential development for the LBKA. Thanks to long standing member, James Bardolph, it looks like we have a new teaching apiary, this time in an area of London we have not previously been able to cover – Holland Park. We cannot say too much at this stage but it is worth sharing the story so far in the hope that there might be members interested in helping run this exceptional site. Yes, we are looking for volunteers again!

James discovered that the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea had set up an apiary in Holland Park some time ago but all the Park staff who had been trained up to run it had since left. We don't know the full story but suffice it to say the bees were just getting on with it.

Cherry blossom.

Holland Park roof-top Apiary.

This is what happens when the bee space is not right.

View from the roof-top apiary.

With these guys everywhere there should be no problem disposing of old frames with brood!

Following the tip-off from James, Mark Patterson made an initial visit in March and found six colonies on a low roof-top apiary in the middle of the park, all in imminent need of attention.

The RBKC Parks department had most but not all of the equipment required and agreed to purchase the rest. However, the weather turned warmer and the bees outperformed the purchasing department – a swarm was soon reported. Mark and I turned up with as much LBKA equipment as we could muster in the time and carried out emergency inspections. We found three colonies had already swarmed and three were about to. We banked queens in mating boxes and culled queen cells until none of the colonies was in a position to swarm for at least a week. This would give us enough time to acquire, clean and repair further equipment.

The next day we had a swarm call from the park!

Mark went to collect it – six metres from the apiary. He then inspected the colonies but, no, not guilty. This swarm had come from somewhere else: probably, we think a feral colony from earlier swarms perhaps from these hives last year.

A further work party was organised for the Sunday of the bank holiday. Mark, David, Aidan, Tristram and new member, Vlad, slaved for seven hours cleaning, scorching and organising till the apiary was in some serviceable shape. This has stemmed the crisis but it won't stop there of course. In the mean time we are negotiating with RBKC to see how we might both benefit from this extraordinary facility. The committee will, of course keep members informed of any new developments.

Announcements

May Monthly Meeting

The May Monthly Meeting will be on **Sunday 10th May** at 11:00 at Fairley House Junior School (220 Lambeth Rd, SE1 7JY). Angela Woods and Jon Harris will lead this session on how to collect swarms.

Swarming season is upon us and however careful we are, swarms do get away. Swarm collection is an invaluable service, helping calm and educate the public and helping prevent the bees from nesting in in-

Where we have our Monthly Meetings – the white door on the left. Source: https://goo.gl/maps/dbB8a

convenient places. Swarm collectors can use swarms to increase their number of colonies or they can pass onto LBKA for Paul (and Karin) to develop them into BBKA-compliant nucs to sell to our members.

Bulk old honey for sale?

Calling all those who have 20lbs or more of last season's honey sat in a bucket (and probably crystallised) and are unsure what to do with it, here's your answer: call, text or email Emily on 07971 453330 or emilyabbott@virginmedia.com as she's looking to buy!

Bees for members

Members interested in purchasing bees should contact Paul on resources@lbka.org.uk or on 0790 301 8351. Nucs cost £140 (plus a £40 deposit for the nuc box) and you'll need an appropriate level of experience. Please also let us know if you'd like to sell bees.

Apiary offers

The children's nursery in North Kensington (W10) who were listed last month are still very keen for someone to keep bees in their site. Please email services@lbka.org.uk if you're interested.

Photography project on London beekeepers

Olivier is a French photographer based in London, whose project – beyond being another series of images showing beekeeping in a city – is to show the diversity of who beekeepers are. He will be looking to photograph beekeepers of all ages, genders and ethnicities.

Please contact him directly on olivierbarjolle@gmail.com.

Want to do a book review?

Would anyone like to review **Do Beekeeping: The secret to happy honeybees**? More details are at http://thedobook.co/products/do-beekeeping-the-secret-to-happy-honey-bees. If

Angela and Jon demonstrating how to collect swarms last year.

so, please contact me on services@lbka.org.uk and I'll arrange for you to receive a review copy.

Old announcements from April

Check previous newsletters at http://lbka.org.uk/newsletters.html or contact services@lbka.org.uk for more details.

Still looking for a swarm coordinator: Contact services@lbka.org.uk for more details.

Volunteers needed for outreach activities: Contact forage@lbka.org.uk if you would like to get involved. We can provide training.

Apiary offers: Blackheath (SE3, in a garden), Stockwell (near Larkhall Park) and North Kensington (W10, in grounds of a children's nursery). Contact services@lbka.org.uk for more information.

Old announcements from March

Forage-planting suggestions? Contact forage@lbka.org.uk if you have any suggestions.

Want to be a mentor? Sounds daunting, but it needn't be – contact Tristram on mentoring@lbka.org.uk for more information.

Selling unpackaged honey to a London restaurant:

contact Barbara barbaratager@gmail.com for more details.

Potential apiaries in North London: forage@lbka.org.uk for more details.

Old announcements from February

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

Learning to collect swarms: if you're interested in learning to collect swarms, contact Emma on admin@lbka.org.uk.

Honey for Stepney City Farm are still looking for more London Honey to sell in their farm shop – contact services@lbka.org.uk for more information.

Help for school bee club in Barnes? Anyone interested in helping our a keen 17-year old school pupil set up a beekeeping club at his school in Barnes should email services@lbka.org.uk for more details.

Do you have any announcements?

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

Out and about

Some of the things the committee have been up to.

Talks

Richard Glassborow gave a talk on bees and forage in London at an event at Vauxhall City Farm. The event was celebrating the "Bee Line for london campaign". There was praise for his presentation via twitter followers including Lambeth council.

On the 14^{th} April, Mark gave a talk about his beekeeping trip to the US to the Wimbledon BKA. The membership voted Cindy Hodge's award winning North Georgia sourwood honey as their favourite. LBKA members also said they preferred this honey when Mark gave this talk at our AGM in November.

Some of Holland Park apiary's existing kit.

The rooftop apiary.

Frame making.

Peacock admiring his reflection. Peacocks were everywhere with their loud, distinctive calls and their curious manner.

Holland Park

Following on from Richard's announcement about the Holland Park apiary, Mark made several visits there to check on their bees. RBKC have invited us to take over management of this apiary, which contains 6 colonies. It would be a good place to mentor our course attendees from West London. Mark and Richard's notable trip was on 23^{th} April where they spent 9 hours shook swarming colonies and cleaning the equipment.

Mark, David, Aidan, Tristram and Vlad, did 7 hours more work there last Sunday. We built from frame and supers. We sorted through the existing kit (lots of supers with frames). We scraped and scorched hive parts and left other items to soak in soda solution. We now have an inventory of all the kit. We moved it out of the greenhouses where the wax was melting in the heat, flecks of paint were flaking off the windows (potentially contaminating the supers), and so we are storing them outside where they will be needed. We inspected some

Tristram scraping and scorching a brood box (when he's not dressed as a beekeeper and holding a flower).

of the hives to help prevent more swarming and David transferred the large swarm to the swarms apiary for Paul to tend to.

April's Monthly Meeting

Cerys' regular update of what happened at last months' meeting.

Cerys Harrow
LBKA member

There was a packed house on this sunny Sunday morning at the beginning of the swarm season (April to July) to listen to a presentation on a crucial topic – swarm management.

The meeting began with some introductory remarks about the importance of swarm management for London beekeepers who, by definition, are operating in an urban environment. In a city a missed swarm doesn't just mean losing half your bees, the queen and probably most of your year's honey crop, it can cause major annoyance and alarm for the general public and a bad name for all beekeepers. The swarm may not just make for the nearest low branch of a convenient tree but could settle on a set of traffic lights or the table leg of a pavement café causing major disruption for people and traffic. Closing a road because a swarm has to be collected from a traffic sign is a sure way of giving beekeepers a bad name.

With that in mind Howard gave a demonstration of the artificial swarm technique (sometimes called the Pagden method). This is the method favoured by the BBKA . It involves careful observation of hives so that the beekeeper is alert to the signs of swarm activity and can manage the split in the colony before the bees fly off. He recommended reading the relevant chapter of Ted Hooper's book "Guide to Bees & Honey" for further information. There were lots of questions from new beekeepers and lots of comments from the more experienced who were quick to remind us that the bees don't read books. What is supposed to happen and what does happen are not always the same thing. Their added knowledge is one of the great benefits of the monthly meetings.

Howard also briefly introduced us to the Snelgrove method of swarm control which works on much the same principle, but uses a specially designed Snelgrove board to control entrance to the hive.

There were so many questions that we were in danger of over-running our allotted time. The meeting ended with some invitations from John and Richard to observe shook swarming and other procedures at their apiaries later in the day. Then discussion carried on over refreshments until we went off to check our hives – as the discussion had reminded us that we should now be doing a weekly check for signs of swarming.

May in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

Swarm control

May (and June) is all about swarm control. Because of this it is a busy month for the beekeeper but also an exciting month. Daylight hours are continuing to increase, a continual supply of new flowers is emerging and healthy bee colonies are expanding.

Routine inspections. 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 removing supers then lifting / tilting the upper chamber to inspect the bottom of the frames in the upper box. It is not necessary to remove the queen excluder or all frames using this quick method although it is not foolproof. The only way to be entirely sure is to remove each frame then carefully and systematically inspect each one. Even then a queen cell hidden behind bees may be missed. I have a colony on double brood and have just found 2 open queen cells in the lower box but none at all in the upper box. If I had relied upon just tilting the upper box then I would have missed them.

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. However, either of these events should put us on "amber alert".

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 destroy the queen cell, as this will not remove the swarming impulse. Best solution is Artificial Swarm method but this does depend upon finding the queen. This was the topic at the April LBKA monthly meeting. Most beekeeping textbooks cover this method.

What if the queen is not marked? If the queen is unmarked or you simply cannot find her then shook swarm is the sensible option. A spare brood box and queen excluder are needed. It is disruptive for the bees but not harmful. Again, textbooks cover this method.

Other jobs

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.

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

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

Spare equipment. Make sure you have sufficient spare equipment for swarm control. This includes having either spare drawn comb or made up frames with foundation.

Most of all – enjoy your May month of beekeeping!

May in the Forage Patch

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

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

Bright red pollen is often red dead nettle, brick red pollen is horse chestnut. Some of these yellow/orange pollens are dandelion. The comb is also stained yellow/orange.

Apple blossom.

I'm going to start this month's column with a look back at April which I feel has been one of the best Aprils for our bees in many years. After a cold and blustery March, temperatures rose quickly, resulting in the warmest April on record. The first week of April brought temperatures well above 15°C and in my apiary I was busy shook swarming most of my colonies. At the same time cherry laurel *Prunus laurocerasus* was simultaneously coming into bloom across the capital. Also in synchrony were cherry, maples and orchard fruit trees. Blackthorn continued to flower well into April – much later than normal – and all these trees and shrubs coming into bloom at once meant an abundance of forage for our bees. By the second week of April just 7 days after shook swarming my bees most colonies had fully drawn their brood boxes, some had also begun to draw supers and one very hard-working colony had filled a super by 12^{th} April. I've never had a super filled this early before so I was quite excited about this.

Mid month saw London temperatures rise to mid 20°C as we experienced weather hotter than Spain. This glut of forage continued with the flowering of *Sorbus* trees around London towards the middle of the month and shrubs like *Choisia* (mock orange) *ceanothus*, flowering currant Ribes, and shrubby limiters (honey suckles). By the end of the month horse chestnut trees across the capital were in full bloom alongside oaks, sycamore and hawthorn. Garden plants like Spanish blue bell appear to be well represented in many hives this Spring – evident by all the photographs of blue and green pollen being posted on Facebook. Dandelions have also had a good year judging from the orange/yellow staining

Broad bean.

Red horse chestnut.

White horse chestnut. The blooms turn from yellow to orange/pink once pollinated to communicate to the bees not to waste their efforts visiting the blooms.

Sorbus.

Rosa xanthina is a thornless yellow rose popular with all kinds of bee.

Choisia, mock orange being worked by a solitary bee.

Cherry laurel blooms.

of the combs in my hives and masses of orange/yellow pollen present. Dandelions need 3 hours of continual sun exposure to produce nectar so hot Springs like this make them a popular source of forage.

All in all I feel it's been a great start to the season.

Looking forward to May we can expect hawthorn and chestnut to reach their peak. Towards the end of May, the limes should bloom. For many London beekeepers, this is the peak honey flow and the backbone of our honey crop.

Other forage plants we can expect to see in May include native bluebells (cream coloured pollen), field beans or broad beans on allotments, early peas, the first squashes, courgettes and pumpkins, garden flowers like *aquilegia*, hardy geraniums, Catmints, *echiums*, and shrubs like *Escalonia*.

LBKA's Apiaries

News from LBKA's teaching apiaries.

Richard Glassborow and Petros Hahladakis

The swarm season is now well under way in spite of the continuing cold weather. All our apiaries are being

A Lasioglossum bee working dandelion.

artificially swarmed and our nucleus apiary is starting to fill up with newly collected swarms. Thank you to our swarm collectors and to Paul Vagg who, together with Karin Courtman, is managing the swarms this year. Two of the swarms have had to go straight into full size brood boxes as they were too big to fit into a nucleus.

Brockwell

The Brockwell teaching apiary has had an eventful few weeks since last month when everything looked fine. Having now moved all hives across to our new centre stage location from our previous well kept secret one, we are quickly becoming one of the main attractions of the community gardens. This has been a double-edged sword in that it is nice to have more people coming up to view the apiary and talk about bees and forage with us, but it also means that we need to make sure that we only keep non-defensive bees. This has resulted in us having to exchange our most prosperous colony with another.

Having overwintered 4 hives we quickly dropped down to 3 when our queen who was hatched and mated late last year developed into a drone layer. This situation quickly changed over the space of a weekend. Having read the comments on the LBKA facebook page and thinking that we had been doing well without any issues of swarming, on the next visit to the apiary as part of our weekly check it shouldn't have come as a surprise to see that 2 of our 3 remaining hives were in full swarm preparation mode. Although we had prepared enough frames and equipment over the Winter to deal with four artificial swarms (one each for our overwintered hives), I had forgotten that we also run on double brood so had used one of the four spare brood boxes on a hive that has been progressing well.

Locating the queen in the first hive and completing the Pagden method of swarm control, we moved onto the second swarming hive. Unfortunately the queen here proved more elusive so it was decided to perform an artificial split and to leave a queen cell in each brood

Massive swarms.

box in the hope that the residing queen would tear the queen cell down. The phone call that came in the next day shouldn't have been a surprise as I made my way back up to the apiary to help David (who was up at the apiary applying a fresh coat of paint) capture a swarm that had nestled nicely on a low hanging branch a few meters away. It was both of our first swarm capture and after a false start we manage to hive the swarm in the last of the Winter prepared hives.

So having entered Spring with 3 hives we now find ourselves with 6 and are looking forward to mentees not only helping us with the weekly inspections, but also helping prepare more brood frames.

Eden

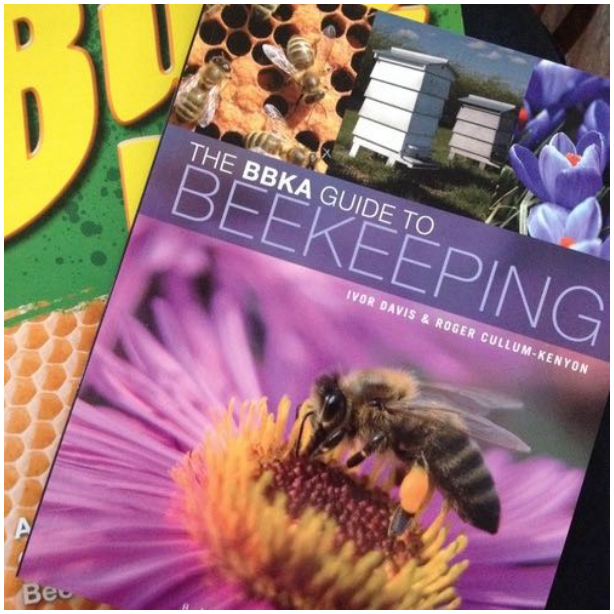
Meanwhile, last month Eden carried out two shook swarms, one artificial swarm and one variation on a Bailey comb change. A huge thank you to those mentees past, present and to be who helped with the frame building. It is also temporarily housing two swarms so things are a little crowded and some improvisation has been called for.

New apiary at Brockwell: still a work in progress.

We strap our hives at Eden because there has been a history of vandalism.

LBKA's Introduction to Beekeeping course

Our first beekeeping course of the year was run last month, during which 30 new beekeepers learnt from some of our most experienced beekeepers. New member and course attendee **Laura Jean Sargent**, reflects on her weekend introduction to bee keeping course with the LBKA. She is co-founder of Bee Kind & Dine (www.beekindanddine.co.uk)



Laura Jean Sargent
LBKA member

As I run a community interest company that's designed to spread information and awareness around bees, I thought it high time I moved my own research on the matter forward to a practical level, so I decided to do a bee keeping course, hoping one day to keep my own bees.

I arrived at a Clapham Old Town, a beautiful pocket of London, which felt a world away from the hectic drone that defines my part of town on the east's Kingsland Road. A beautiful old church was to be our classroom for the next two days, perched just high enough to catch glimpses of the city's skyline beyond the trees. We were all warmly welcomed over registration, handed our own copies of the BBKA's guide to beekeeping and armoured up with a tea or two as we took our seats with anticipation.

A frame we use for teaching, with a photo of brood (centre), stores (top left) and bees.

The LBKA's Chairman, Richard Glassborow, kicked us off with an introduction that set the relaxed, laid back ambience for the day. He advised us to "try not to learn" (which was music to the ears of those who were clearly a few years or more out of the schooling habit, like myself) and assured us that it would all "come with practice." He then handed over to Mark Patterson, the organisation's forage officer and a community manager for the charity Groundwork, who took us through the history of bee keeping, bees' origins and their evolution.

Like most of the experienced beekeepers in the room, Mark knew his stuff, and had a plethora of knowledge to share both on and off script. We learned of world's honey hunters, both ancient and present-day, and how beekeeping started with the Egyptians who kept them in clay pots and pipes. That iconic rounded beehive image was finally identified for me (it's a skep and was used in the dark ages to keep bees) and the design of the modern bee box was talked through, paying a well-earned homage to Reverend Lorenzo Lorraine Langstroth, who designed the first bee box that incorporated 'bee space'.

We moved on to the lifecycle of an egg through to fully-fledged bee, and the important incubation time differences between the queens, workers and drones. We were taught how to recognise worker, drone and queen larvae from the shape and colour of capped cells. This is an intrinsic part of beekeeping that's relevant to swarm control, a topic we were to cover later in the course. As such, it was both well iterated and engaging, which helped the facts to stick – just as well as we'd be needing them later.

After a short break Tristram Sutton, the LBKA's mentoring officer, talked us through the colony, showed us what feral bees nests look like (on seeing them I re-

Some wild comb.

alised that I hadn't a clue!) and talked us through the individual life-cycles of the bees. Another eye-opener came in the form of the division of labour within the hive, with each bee working through various tasks depending on their age, before 'graduating' at 20 days old to become a foraging bee, who can leave the hive to hunt for pollen, nectar, water and propolis.

Throughout, we were reminded that bees don't read the same textbooks that we do, so there was no use hanging on to any rigid expectations. This was reassuring and set the seed for an attitude that grew throughout the weekend. It was this attitude that secured beekeeping, for me, as something I would really enjoy, in that it's an organic, sometimes unpredictable process that requires a holistic, patient and loyal approach.

It was then on to hive maintenance before a session on pollination, nectar and honey, as well as an overview of what constitutes good forage for bees. From this session, it fast became clear that to be interested in bees is also to be interested in plants, to some degree at least. Luckily, I am, so it was a welcome strengthening to that particular bow-string and I soon had plans whizzing around my head for my window boxes and patio pots.

We were encouraged not to underestimate how arduous foraging was for a bee, with imaginative facts to help paint a very real picture. For example, a 450-gram jar of honey is equal to a round the world flight for a single bee. I don't think I'll ever look at a honey jar quite the same way again now that I know that.

We moved on to the beekeeping year with Alan Bezzant, who keeps hives in both London and France, and was keen to stress the cyclical nature of beekeeping. We learned of the two main worries of a beekeeper (the varroa mite and swarm control) and how to identify and deal with both was well explained. And, we were taken through the year's main events, from the appearance of drones in the hive over Spring, to the potential honey harvest of late Summer - something we all found out that Alan particularly looked forward to as he declared, "honey is designed to be in a jar, or on toast!"

The anatomy of a hive was covered next, which, on refection, could have been my favourite 'classroom' part of the weekend. The explanation of its construction was like drawing the cloak off an unarguably marvelous system that had otherwise felt quite unimaginable. My wonder of the seemingly unattainable was quickly turned to knowledge and, ergo, an even weightier respect for a natural world as a result.

After lunch, which I spend on the grassy graveyard in the sun, it was on to the practical tasks, and we split into two groups to take turns at inspecting a hive and frame building. My group started with the former.

I don't think I'll ever forget popping my bee-suit cherry. Despite its light weight, you feel well protected inside its safety, and without as much impairment to your vision as I had imagined. Even still, I triple checked all my zips and velcro tabs, and made sure that there were no chinks in my armour for a curious bee to exploit.

We went with one of the LBKA's members to her hive just down the road, which she keeps in a resident's garden (with their permission of course). Her hive had both a brood box but also, a super that was being used for brood, so 'a brood and a half'. As she had recently split her hive, placing the queen with some of the bees in a nucleus box, we were on the look out for new queen cells. When a colony realises it doesn't have a queen, it begins to build up a fertilized cell into a 'queen cup' and feeds it royal jelly, thus creating a new one.

We were in luck, with many new queen cells to see in the flesh. Our beekeeper discarded all but three of them, keeping the ones she felt looked the strongest. Whichever queen hatches first will go about destroying

any other queen cells she finds in the hive. If they hatch simultaneously they'll fight it out, leaving the victor to rule over the hive.

We each had the opportunity to hold a frame and even to hold the super (the upper part of the box that, in this case, was being used for brood but usually is where honey's stored). This gave us a very good idea on how physically strong you need to be to handle the hive as they get weighty when full (I made a mental note to do some upper-strength training!).

Back at the church, we spend the last part of the day building frames, a session taken by Paul who, just two years earlier, was in our shoes. His knowledge and enthusiasm shone through and we'd knocked up a few each in no time. Morale dipped slightly when we learnt of how many of these things you actually need – at least 22 per hive, but more like 55 if you're stacking your supers high. I could see tedium setting in for myself at around five, so made another mental note; "remember to rope friends in when the time comes". Sorted.

Day two kicked off with a topic we were all curious about, if the student questions from the previous day were anything to go by; swarming. It was over to

Alan again for this session, which started with the crux of the matter – bees' unstoppable instinct to increase their population. For me, an explanation for why bees swarm was another one of those massive life questions that I never seemed to get round to answering... Until now.

Primary swarms and castes were explained before a detailed session on swarm prevention. Marking the queen so she's easy to spot is a good start (and should be done as standard practice), young queens are less likely to swarm and making sure your colony has plenty of room in the hive is another tactic to entice them to stay on side. Artificial swarming was gone into and how to collect a swarm was well demonstrated (with props!) although it may take a year or so's experience before I'm confident enough to attempt that.

Simon Wilks took to the floor next to talk us through pests and diseases, being sure to reiterate that no hive is pest free and that a low level of disease is normal. The trick is to keep a healthy hive, so that they can fight off any pests and diseases themselves. Examples of brood diseases were shown, such as American foul brood and European foul brood, and the right procedures to follow were highlighted - some diseases require a full report to your local bee inspector, whilst others are less serious and can be dealt with on a much smaller scale.

After some well-deserved time spent over the nemesis that is varroa mite, Paul hit the floor to tell us about his first year of bee-keeping. His engaging session was inspiring and put any nerves at bay, as he quickly explained the disastrous mistakes he'd made as a novice – squashing his mentor's queen in his first week and losing someone else's in his second! It was good to hear that these mistakes can, and do, happen, so as a shiny, new bee keeper, there's no use being afraid of making them.

Next, the LBKA's events officer gave an insightful talk on what else the LBKA can offer its members, such as

support, monthly meetings and BBKA membership, before Emily Nye gave us the run down on getting started. This included how and where to buy your bees from, what type of bee to go for when you're starting out (different species have different characteristics) and things to consider when positioning your hive or apiary.

The afternoon saw another practical session, with half of the group heading out to see hives and the other half staying put to be talked through some of the LBKA members' favourite bits of kit. This was a great session and really brought the practice to life. A pair of cut-off jean shorts created a stir amongst us, until we were assured that they made great fodder for the smoker – believable, as you'd be brave to don them alone for a Spring-time hive inspection!

We spent the last half an hour or so with Mark Patterson at the beautiful Eden Garden apiary where we delved into a hive. It was interesting to note the differences between this hive and the one we'd inspected on the previous day - these bees were much more curious. The queen was well hidden, so we weren't able to spot her despite a vigorous search but this time, we were able to see drones going about their business. It was a fantastic way to end an incredible weekend.

I came away from the course just brimming with knowledge, enthusiasm and even more respect and adoration for bees than I had had before. The LBKA offer a mentorship programme, making it easy to continue your journey into bee keeping and I cannot wait to get started. In fact, it's a fascinating course, whether you intend to keep bees or not, and you'd be hard pushed to leave without a renewed awe for nature's exquisite and particular processes that quietly keep our astounding world spinning.

Mark's travels in Gibraltar

Another travelogue from Mark, who visited Gibraltar a couple of years ago and writes about the wild flowers and insects he encountered.

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

Many people will be familiar with Gibraltar. Our long standing feud with the Spanish over its sovereignty regularly hits the national press and it has its own TV show 'Gibraltar – Britain in the Sun'. The area is a popular tourist destination with its large population of wild monkeys attracting crowds from around Europe. But there is much more to this British territory than its wild apes as I found out in April 2013 when I spent a week there searching for wild flowers and their pollinators.

Before I talk about Gibraltar's flowers and its pollinators I'll give a brief overview of the area's history and geography. Gibraltar is a small British territory (6.8km^2 in area) on the southern tip of Spain's Iberian Peninsula, its affectionately referred to as 'Gib' by the locals who mostly identify themselves as being British. It was captured by the British in 1704 and has been a British territory since 1713 despite numerous attempts by the Spanish to re-take it. The area is unique in having a diverse mixture of Afro-European fauna and flora found nowhere else in Europe. The 'Rock' itself is a large Jurassic Limestone formation rising 426 meters above sea level with steep slopes on the West side of the rock and almost vertical cliffs on the opposite East Side.

The rock and its limestone geology are unique in Spain where the main rock type is sandstone and granite. Gibraltar's rocks belong to the same Limestone formations found across the narrow sea crossing in North Africa. Around 5 million years ago the Mediterranean basin flooded and the rock was separated from Morocco. At this time many African species of plant and animal became trapped and isolated and have since evolved alongside European species. Many of the rocks African plant species cannot survive in the typical European habitats found on the mainland as they are limestone specialists and cannot cope with the acid conditions on the granite and sandstone areas. The result today is a unique mix of Africa meets Europe with assemblages of plants and animals found nowhere else in the world including several rare and endemic species.

I had visited Gib once before the previous October on a short trip and found the entire area to be baked tinder dry and aside from the occasional ***Autumn Colchium*** and ***Amaryllis belladonna*** there were very few wild

Autumn Colchium. Colchicum lusitanum grows throughout the upper rock.

Painted Lady nectaring on Cut leaved Valerian Centrathus calcitrapae.

The Alamedia Botanical Gardens.

plants in flower and even fewer bees. Gibraltar like much of southern Spain is subject to scorching hot Summers so many plants and animals go dormant or hibernate for much of the dry season mid-Summer to Winter. The Spring in Gibraltar is quite spectacular though in contrast. Winter rains and a frequent supply of moist air rising up the Rock's Eastern cliffs brings lots of moisture in Spring transforming the arid rock into a Lush Tropical paradise. The best time to visit to see wild flowers and their pollinators is late March and April, but there is still plenty to see if you visit in May.

I decided to visit the second week of April because I wanted to see flowers at their best but I also wanted to coincide my trip with the peak in Spring bird migration. Having the narrowest sea crossing in the Western Mediterranean the rock is a magnet for many migrating birds, especially birds of prey such as kites, eagles, buzzards and vultures which rely on thermals to cover great distances.

It's not just birds which migrate here in Spring. Many species of Dragonfly, large Solitary bees, butterflies and Hoverflies also make the 14km journey from North Africa to Europe. One of the best ways to see these migrations is to take a pelagic boat trip out into the straight. Many tired insect travellers will alight on the boats to rest their tired flight muscles. Migrant hawkers, Chasers, and Darter dragonflies are numerous, ***Vollucela hoverflies*** are also common and occasionally clouds of **Painted Lady Butterfly** flutter past. I noted many insect bodies floating on the ocean surface during the boat trip. Clearly the sea crossing is treacherous for insects and many don't complete the journey – **gulls**, **Cory's Shearwater** and **Black Terns** eagerly pick their lifeless bodies from the waters surface. Occasionally a large **bee** will also buzz past. Another reason for taking a boat trip is to see the numerous **whales** and **dolphins** which inhabit the straight alongside **sea turtles**, **Sun Fish**, **Basking Sharks**, **Humpback**, **Minke** and **Sperm Whales**. The local **Striped Dolphin** are among the most social and easiest to approach in Europe and come right along the side of the boats. We had the pleasure of a pod of around 15 adults and a calf bow ride our boat for around 40 minutes.

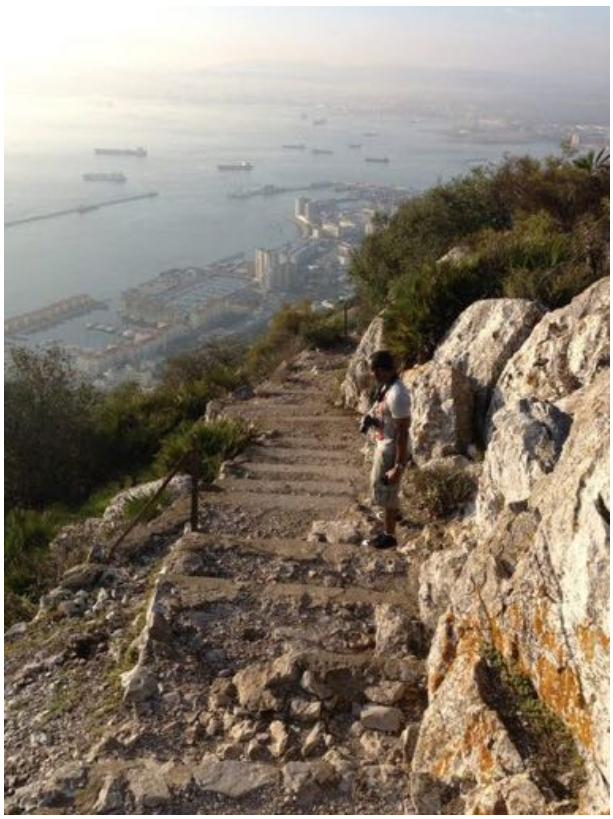
One of the first stops on my trip and a great place to see pollinators is the Alameda Botanic Gardens. Here you can get up close to many of the Rock's rare and threatened plants which are being cultivated to conserve the species and to repopulate the Upper Rock Reserve. The gardens also boast impressive assemblages of North African and Mediterranean plants which in April are almost all in flower at once and attract masses of buzzing insects. The Mediterranean is a hotspot for global bee diversity both in terms of population size and numbers of species found in the region, Spain alone has over 1000 species of bee and identifying them all is not an easy task. At best in the field you can only expect

Violet Carpenter Bee

to get to Genus level with most of them as many are hard to identify to species level unless you can capture them for close up examination with a hand lens. At the Alameda Gardens I saw lots of **Flower Bees**. Some were a local sub-species of our **Hairy Footed Flower Bee**, they were identical in every way except much brighter in colour almost ginger. Other species of Flower Bee I could not identify as they were too fast and wouldn't stay still long enough to get a good look at them. I also saw lots of **Mining Bees** similar to our tawny mining bee and a great number of **Osmia Bees**. **Bumble bees** were quite scarce. Although most of the common UK bumble bees can be found in Spain along with other bumble bees not found in the UK they are scarce in the Iberian Peninsula – the climate is probably too hot for their large hairy bodies to keep cool.

Leaving the Botanic Gardens you can either take a short but quite a steep and physically draining walk up the winding roads of the Western face of the Rock or you can take the cable car or a taxi ride to the Upper Rock Reserve. This is the really wild part of Gibraltar, protected as a nature reserve and home to the Barbary Macaque apes. The Upper Rock is dominated by a type of wild olive scrub and dwarf woodland called **macchia**. Much of the scrub is evergreen **Holme Oak**, **Wild Olive**, **Juniper**, **gorse-type genista scrub** and patches of wild cut leaved **lavender**, **thymes**, **rosemary**, **wild sage**, **Buckthorn** with a dense understory of herbaceous perennials. Most of the wild bees inhabiting these areas are arboreal and are difficult to see spending much of their time up in the canopy where they feed on arboreal flowers and burrow into decaying branches to make their nests. One of them is the impressive **Violet Carpenter Bee** – an absolutely enormous solitary bee that makes its nests inside the hollow stems of dead tree branches and tall Umbellifer flowers among the Macchia. You usually hear them well before you see them, they make a very loud humming noise. They are pretty spectacular bees having glossy black bodies with iridescent purple wings the colour of Cadbury's chocolate foil wrappings.

Throughout the macchia there are numerous glades and clearings where you will find **silver knapweed**, ***Centaurea sonchifolia***, **cut-leaved Valerian**, ***Centranthus calcitrapae***, ***Thapsia villosa*** a large yellow cow parsley like flower – often covered in bees and lots of introduced ***Acanthus mollis*** which is becoming a well established pest on much of the reserve. Bees and large pollinating chaffer type beetles were on virtually every flower.



The ascent down the Western side of the Rock looking down towards the small town.

Along the path ways **Blue Pimpernel** ***Anagallis arvensis***, **Rambling Fumitory** ***fumaria capreolata***, **bladder vetch**, ***Anthyllis tetraphylla***, **wild fennel**, **Greater Soft Storksbill**, ***Erodium chium*** and the subspecies ***subcordata*** of the **Sticky Restharrow Ononis viscosa** grow in profusion. These were visited by the local honey bees. There is a small charity in Gibraltar which tend the only managed hives in the town. Contrary to claims on their website they do not keep the **Scutella Central African race of honey bee** but the local Spanish race ***Apis melifera iberiensis***. See the photograph of some of them foraging on **Southern Birds Foot Trefoil**. Being surrounded on 3 sides by the sea and being less than 7km^2 in area it must be a challenging place to keep bees not least to get new queens mated.

One morning whilst visiting the Bird Observatory on the Upper Rock Reserve I joined the bird ringers to go check their mist nets they use to catch birds as part of their migration studies. In the thick and impenetrable scrub was the remains of a very old vehicle, probably abandoned since the Second World War from the look

Spanish Festoon Zerynthia rumina.

The endemic and extremely rare Gibraltar Campion Silene tomentosa.

of it. Inside was a wild honey bee nest with comb hanging from the metal roof.

The bird observatory has one of the very few ponds found in Gibraltar. Limestone is porous so there are very few natural places where water can collect to form pools. The man made pond at the Observatory is visited by many birds but it is also visited by many insects as they need to drink too. It is the only place where I saw frogs – the rest of the Upper Rock is too dry for them to survive.

One of the best parts of the Rock to see wild flowers and pollinators is the Mediterranean steps, a 1.4km hike starting at 140m above sea level and climbing to the summit of the Rock on its Eastern side along very tough terrain involving a steep climb up the Eastern Cliffs. The route starts off on an easy gradient but then climbs very steeply up the vertical face of the Eastern side of the Rock. This part of the climb is not for the faint hearted as there are few safety ropes or rails and a sheer drop should you fall from the stone carved foot path.

On the scree slopes along the steps cornfield annuals which are native to the locality grow in abundance alongside **Bristly bugloss**, ***Echium creticum*** of which Gibraltar has its own sub species ***coincyanum***. These plants grow at home in the UK and are often cited as being native but they were actually introduced to the UK by man as weed seeds in the earliest domestic grains brought from the Mediterranean. In the UK these plants rely on sympathetic agricultural practices to provide the disturbed soil they need to grow. Here in their natural habitat the crumbling limestone cliffs provide the disturbed soil habitats they require to flourish.

Other plants growing out of the thin soils here included **Cut Leaved** and **Red valerian**, **Cut Leaved lavender** and **wild Calendula**. This area was covered in Butterflies including the **Spanish Festoon *Zerynthia rumina***, **Cleopatra butterfly** and large numbers of migrating **Painted Ladies** – many of which will refuel at Gibraltar before continuing to migrate into North West Europe reaching the British Isles and as far north as Greenland.

There are numerous caves throughout the Rock where rain water run off has dissolved weaker parts of the limestone. Many solitary bees excavate their nests in the soft crumbling Rock around the cave entrances. Nearby Mallow leaved bindweed, ***Convulvulus althaeoides*** rambled through the wild olives etching a living out of the vertical Rock face and attracted lots honey bees.

As I climbed higher up the steeper parts of the Rock different plant communities are found. Mediterranean Squirting Cucumber **Ecballium elaterium**, ***Doronicum***, and **Aromatic Inula**, **Dittrichia viscosa** grow. On more exposed cliffs several rare plants grow in abundance. They include the **Gibraltar Candytuft *Iberis gibraltarica*** and the **Gibraltar Saxifrage *Saxifraga globulifera*** a species endemic to Gibraltar. An even rarer plant unique to Gibraltar is the **Gibraltar Campion *Silene tomentosa***. This plant was though extinct until a few years ago when a Rock climber accidentally discovered a small group of them growing on a very high outcrop. There are only a handful of wild specimens left and their exact location a guarded secret. I unfortunately did not get to see this plant.

One of the most spectacular plants I saw on the sleep cliffs of the steps were **Giant Squill *Scilla peruviana***. The iridescent purple flowers attracted lots of insects including lots of solitary bees.

Other parts of the Rock good for botanising and looking for pollinators is Europa Point on the southern tip of the peninsula. Here the Botanical society of Gibraltar and the Gibraltar Nature conservancy have done a lot of work to restore the native maritime coastal habitats. Here vast swathes of **Purple vipers bugloss**, ***Echium plantagineum*** grow amongst **Wild Calendula**, **Southern Bird's Foot Trefoil lotus creticus**, **Mediterranean Catchfly Silene colorata**, **Italian Sainfoin *Hedysarum coronarium*** and native **Chrysanthemums**. **Gibraltar Sea Lavender *Limo-***

Scilla Autumnalis – it was widespread along the Upper Rock when I first visited in October.

nium emarginatum also grows here – another endemic species. Europa point is where a lot of migrating birds and insects first make landfall, and many entomologists and ornithologists gather at the observatory there to look out for and record incoming migrants.

Surprisingly one of the interesting parts of the Gibraltar to look for plants is the old town centre. The narrow streets and steep stairwells are often home to little botanical gems. Many of these are not native but have escaped over the years and makes for an eclectic mix of plants such as **Wild Snap Dragon *Antirrhinum majus*** and **schiizostylis** which grow out of the old lime stone walls. **Cape Sorrell Oxalis pes-caprae** is common along old walls and is host for the parasitic plant **Branched broomrape, Orobanche ramose**.

Aside from wonderful wild flowers and lots of bees and butterflies Gibraltar is also a pretty good place to see reptiles. There are many species of lizard, snakes and Gecko found on the Rock, many are easy to see early in the morning as they bask in the sun to warm their bodies. Some are restricted to Gibraltar in Europe being descendants of African species stranded millions of years ago when the Straight flooded.

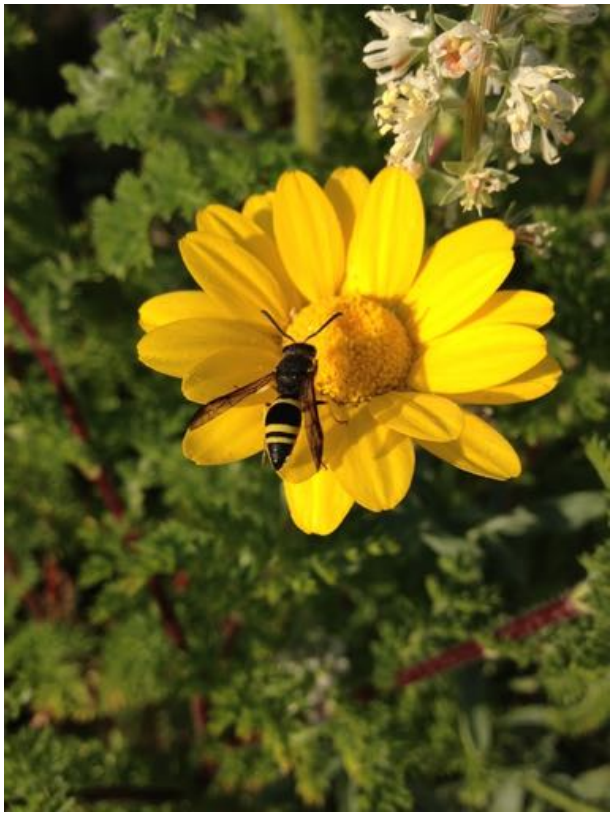
I would highly recommend a visit to Gibraltar in April but be warned, there are very few modern and respectable hotels in the town, most of the accommodation options are basic, out dated and costly.

Another word of caution is regarding the Apes. You cannot walk around the Upper Rock Reserve with food or shiny objects on display – you will be robbed! My travel companion I went on this 5 day trip with was literally 'mugged' by a gang of Apes after they spotted the shiny foil wrappings of his sandwich pocking out of his trouser pocket. They also stole his Wallet and souvenir bag – do not underestimate them. I actually saw a troop of monkeys ransack a parked car after the occupants left their windows down. The apes climbed in one side grabbed what they could carry and left out the opposite window. The female passenger didn't get her handbag back as it disappeared along with the ape over the cliff edge.

*Solitary bee on Rock marigold **Calendula suffruticosa sbsp. lusitanica**.*

When climbing the Rock and looking for wildlife it is best to start early in the morning on the Western side. The mornings often produce moisture carrying breezes which collide with the base of the Rock's Eastern side and are pushed up the cliffs providing water for plants. This side also receives more shade in the morning so the climb is easier as it's not too hot yet. Many of the plants secrete nectar early in the morning before it gets too hot, by early afternoon it can become very dry, the moisture laden fogbank around the base of the Rock dissipates and it becomes too hot for many plants to secrete nectar and most pollinators are less active. When you come to climb the Eastern side of the Rock which is very steep and physically strenuous the sun will have moved westwards and the Rock provides welcome shade from the heat. Temperatures were in the high 20s the entire week we were there.

Aside from wildlife watching there is a lot to do in Gibraltar, the whole town is steeped in history, there are caves to explore, underground museums, an 8th century Moorish castle, Military museum, and Ocean village marina where you'll find Casinos, shops and restaurants. There are also lots of antique and old book shops in the town centre. Almost everyone in Gib speaks English as a first language, they use the British pound as currency and you'll find familiar shops such as M&S, Morrisons, Body Shop, next, Tesco and the Post Office. It really is Britain in the sun.



The solitary wasp Ancistrocerus scoticus nectaring on wild ***Calendula****.*

Mother Barbary Macaque and her baby. This ape was sat on a railing on the cliff top and didn't show the slightest bit of concern that there was a 400ft drop behind her with nothing to break her fall

Moorish Gecko Tarentola mauritanica found on the doorstep to our apartment.

The Bulgarian Beekeeper

Vesko continues his month-by-month series writing about his beekeeping back in his native Bulgaria.

Vesko Starchikov
LBKA member

In May comes the first intensive foraging. The honey-bees collect nectar from locust trees. Around the apiary beech, oak, maple, spruce, and pine are in flower and bees collect pollen and nectar from them. Many other wild flowers, shrubs and plants bloom. Dandelion and some fruit species are still in flower.

Condition of bee colonies

Every day I check whether the queens are laying well. They lay from 1500 to 2000 and even more eggs a day. Strong colonies already have 8-10 whole combs with brood. Swarms are ready to take advantage of nectar flow. Bees work hard to produce wax to make comb.

I regularly give the bees undrawn foundation to keep

them busy and to reduce the swarming instinct of the bees.

So I am constantly in the apiary. I expand the nests with undrawn frames and regularly check whether they've drawn comb and cut some of this built wax. I take measures of timely and effective care against the failing of bee colonies in the swarm state.

A few days before the acacia blossoms, I make sure the bees have plenty of space, because if the hives are full of brood, honey and pollen before the main nectar flow, they may plan to swarm, and I have to stop it. I can prevent swarming by splitting the colony into two parts. The first part I leave the queen and in the other one I put a virgin queen.

In May, I must perform mandatory inspection of hives to detect the European, acidic and bubble foulbrood and other diseases. If I find something suspicious, I will send samples to a veterinary laboratory.

May is also very suitable month for a continuation of the collection of bee pollen.

April's Facebook (In)digest(ion)

LBKA's open Facebook page is an active community of over 1000 from around London and other parts of the UK and world. Lots of interesting material gets posted, but here's a mere glimpse of what you might have missed.

Aidan Slingsby
services@lbka.org.uk

Shook swarms

Some were taking advantage of the warm sunny weather to do shook swarms on their bees. Although a very disruptive procedure that results in losing all the brood, strong colonies recover quickly and some find that it really stimulates the colony build-up. As a means for changing comb, its main advantage is that you wipe out most of the varroa population as the overwhelming majority these reside on brood.

Swarming

A hot topic at this time of year, there were plenty of people needing to do artificial swarms and swarm call-outs, even in early April. Angela commented that they seem to have "leapfrogged from Winter straight into Summer".

Andrew was worried his bees would swarm as he was due to go away for a few days and asked if anyone could help provide boxes and frames to him urgently, so he could give them more space. Running out of equipment is something we all have to be careful about – Mark and Karin also reported running out equipment because of swarms and because bees are building up so quickly. Angela wondered if putting the queen excludee at the bottom may help buy some time. Emily noted some pros and cons of double brood for giving bees more

Karin's bees marching into a nuc box.

space: a "con" being that it's more effort in inspect and easier to miss queen cells.

Angela posted a useful YouTube video about artificial swarming: http://bit.ly/1KE1jur

Andrew asked if it's possible to repair foundation that was stored on an uneven surface, so snapped. Various suggestions suggested it might be possible.

With the best will and experience in the world, swarms do get away. Richard's cutout swarmed before he had chance to shook-swarm it – it's difficult to inspect cutout comb for queen cells! Emily's bees swarmed shortly after she's artificially swarmed them. . . whoops! Karin posted a video of her bees that had swarmed (whilst she was giving a talk at the course!) marching into a nuc after a successful capture.

Mark has observed that his bees are large colonies that seem desperate to swarm, prompting Richard to suggest that once they are in the mood for swarming, nothing will stop them.

Angela suggested what equipment swarm-collectors should take when attending to swarms: a bee suit (or at least a veil), a smoker, a nuc box or other suitable container, some frames, a white cotton sheet, a cardboard box, gaffer tape and gloves. She also suggests a bottle of water with an atomiser so water can be sprayed at the entrance or on bees before closing them in, string,tape to cordon off an area and secateurs. She asked if there was anything to add. Mark added a bee brush, Oliver added anti-histamines and Sarah suggested a big water bottle on a pole.

Forage

Bill reported that Harrow Council cut their verges less frequently, allowing a "splendid dandelion display across Harrow". Perhaps one of the few positive results of council cost-cutting?

Overturned lorry

Mark posted a link to a news item about an overturned lorry on a motorway in Washington State: http://bbc.in/1zoqG2l, a too-common occurrence that results from the mass movement of bees by truck across

Lots of beautiful blossom out now for the bees.

the US for crop pollination. He said that with no national bee inspectorate, amateur beekeeping associations are often left to clean up the mess, though he noted that some states have very good support networks. Regulations are often at state – rather than national level.

Hairy Footed Flower Bee nests

Mark reported that he's monitoring a unusual colony of Hairy Footed Flower Bees in Wandsworth; unusual because the bees are nesting on the ground in dry clay beneath the overhang of a balcony instead of old walls and dry steep sloping river banks or cliffs as is usually

Hairy Footed Flower Bee nests

European hornet on the left; Asian hornet on the right.

the case. He found 180 nests last year and over 500 this year.

Pests

Andrea posted a link to a video of Peter Neumann's talk on Small Hive Beetle from the National Honey Show: http://bit.ly/1DMbffw.

There was some discussion about the invasion of the Asian hornet. Angela posted a photo comparing the Asian with European hornet and Andrea said to email alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk if you see one.

Open garden

Richard had his garden open to the public as part of the National Garden Scheme.

Bee ID

Jude asked for help in identifying this, a number of which seemed to be making a home under his sister's patio:

Initial answers suggested it was a honey bee, but Mark suggested it was a member of the *Andrena* (solitary) bee family and that is was harmless and only active for a few months of the year.

Forage seeds

Mark reported that he tries wild flower seeds from different sellers each year in the community garden where he keeps bees.

Last year he grew Flowerscapes' Pollinator Mix – his favourite so far – because they flowered the longest, had by far the widest diversity of flower species (40

Mark's seed trials.

species) and attracted the widest variety of insects including honey bees, bumble bees, solitary bees, pollinating beetles and even hummingbird hawk moth. He also grew the Garden Bee Mix which was very colourful with more showy flower varieties, taller than the Flowerscapes mix, mainly attracted bumble bees and contained 21 species.

This year he's growing some different mixes from Flowerscapes - Grow-Sure Bright Mix, Grow-Sure Pastel Colours Mix and MiracleGro's 'Flower Magic' mix. He'll monitor their progress over the Summer.

Neonicotinoids

There was more research reported on neonicotinoids this month, that bees seemed to have a preference for sugar solutions containing neonicotinoids – perhaps bees 'get a buzz from the nicotine-like chemicals in the same way smokers crave cigarettes" (http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-32399907). Andrea noted that things we still don't know include what are realistic field exposures, what impact these pesticides have on other wildlife and what pesticides farmers are using instead of neonicotinoids during the current EU moratorium.

Reactions

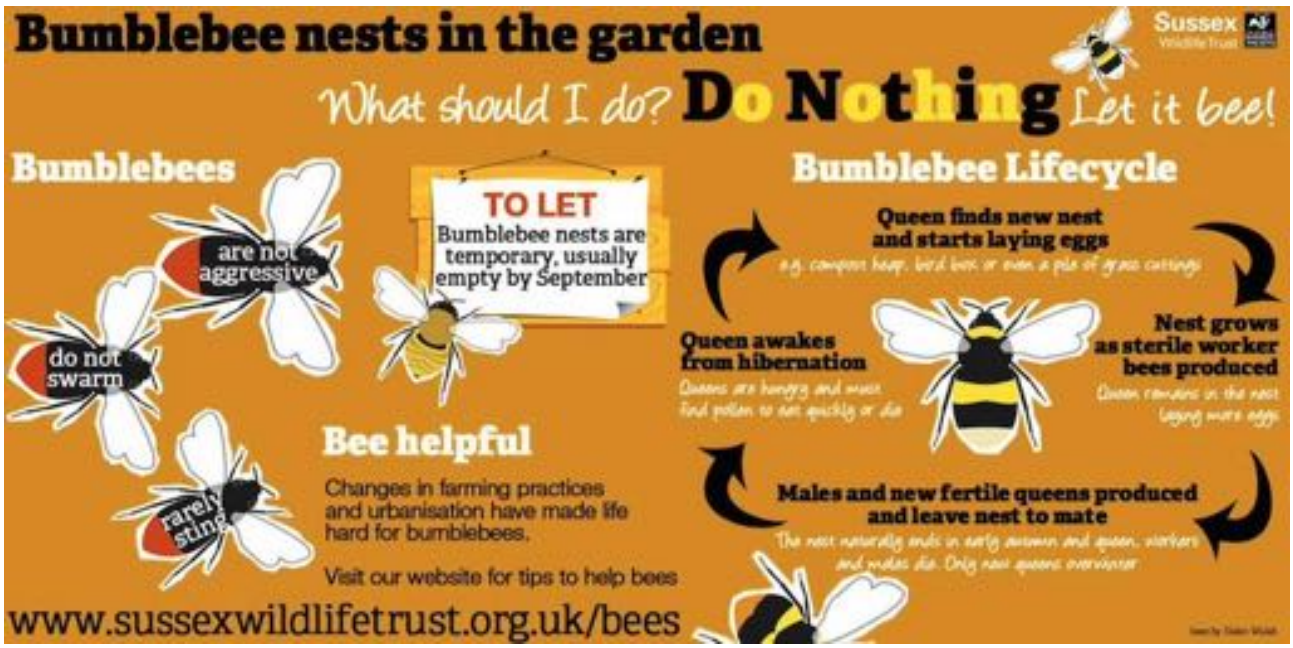
Andrew told us about his reaction to being stung of swollen hands and arms.

Angela also posted some guidance for dealing allergic reactions.

Odds and ends

Karin wondered why there's a picture of a bee on the Network Rail sign.

Thomas reported progress on the public observation hive that is now open to the public in Walpole Park, Ealing, next to the cafe and drinks area.



What to do if you find a bumblebee nest in your garden - nothing!

Allergic reaction advice.

Is that a bee?

Thomas posted a cross-section of pollen stored in cells.

Public observations hives in Walpole Park Ealing

Andrea posted an infographic about what to do if you find bumblebee nests in your garden.

Lots of beautiful blossom out now for the bees.

Bluebells at the Ealing apiary.

Emily started a conversation about pollen and also posted a link to Sheffield's BKA's guide to identifying pollen by its colour: at http://www.sheffieldbeekeepers.org.uk/tools/pollen-chart/. Thomas posted some nice cross-sections of cells with pollen in them.

And that's what people were saying last month.

Bluebells under a tree at the allotment.

Adventures in Beeland: Beekeeping – the frantic way

Emily's regular guest article from her excellent blog: http://adventuresinbeeland.com/. This month, it's all been a bit frantic.

Emily Scott
LBKA member

I think I can now safely say that all of our five colonies made it through Winter. I am not completely satisfied with this result as two are small, only on about four to five frames. A perfect result would have been five booming colonies with brood boxes full to the brim.

Still, I know we are lucky to have our bees safe and well, as the blogs I read around the world remind me that not all colonies make it through Winter. We have not opened our hives to find the heartbreaking sight of a tiny dead cluster. Our success has probably been aided by a 2014 which was a dream year for weather, with plenty of warm, sunny days interspersed by light rain to keep the nectar flowing.

Having five colonies does mean a lot of work though, especially at this time of year. Endless hammering together of frames (my least favourite job) and stirring sugar into water to make syrup to encourage the bees to draw out fresh new combs as part of the Bailey comb exchange. Then transporting the heavy syrup to the bees, trying to find a space to fit with my bulky bee equipment on a packed Saturday bus. Rushing down to the allotment before work, or rushing over afterwards when it's nearly getting dark. Broken nails and yellow propolis stained hands.

I am grateful for the sunshine though, and am enjoying watching all the new flowers coming along. The bluebells are here!

Last weekend I helped out at a practical session for the new recruits taking the Ealing association's annual beginners course. I supervised them inspecting a few hives, showing them how to turn the frames and what they were looking at. There were about thirteen of them, so as you can imagine there were plenty of questions. Everything is new; they are learning the complete basics of what pollen, nectar, honey and brood look like. Some of them didn't know what a varroa mite was (such blissful innocence).

When opening up hives with beginners my main worry is not that the bees will hurt them, but that they will hurt the bees. It's hard for them to remember that they should hold the frames over the hive, as otherwise the queen could fall or fly to the floor and get squashed. Still, I did think the lady who watched without a veil on was extremely brave; she obviously has not been stung under the eye before. Beginners tend to be obsessed by two things: honey and finding the queen. We

Orange, pine nut, honey and yogurt cake.

Lift off.

found some queens and saw plenty of honey so that was good.

When I told Drew about the beginners session, he said "Will the first lesson be how to eat cake?". I explained to the beginners that the association is really just a tea and cake club with the beekeeping as an excuse on the side, but I'm not sure they believed me. They'll learn.

When I visited the allotment bees, I was amused to discover that they've propolised the block of wood that sits over one of the crown board holes so that it's propped up at a jaunty angle. The power of propolis!

Bees hanging out underneath the wood. They've built some comb under there too.

Bee bottoms.

Snake's head fritillary.

The second time I've spotted a flower emerge at the Barbican centre. It's a snake's head fritillary, official name *Fritillaria meleagris*. They used to grow in meadows alongside the river Thames and were collected in huge quantities to be sold in London markets, but have now become a rarely seen wildflower. A lot of their habitat was destroyed during World War II, when most of the ancient meadows became used for food crops.

The running around after the bees recently has left me partly happy to see them again but also quite exhausted. We are arranging to sell two colonies, but sometimes I have thoughts about giving up beekeeping completely, or at least giving up one of the sites. The main thing stopping me is that I enjoy being with the bees and it would be a shame to lose the skill. I would miss the bees but not all the logistics of storing and transporting equipment. Perhaps I'll see how it goes this Summer. Have you ever thought about giving up beekeeping?

Members selling to members

This section is for members selling things or selling services to others. This could include honey, nucs and wax. Email services@lbka.org.uk for more details.

Upcoming events

Sunday 10th May: Monthly meeting: Swarm collection

11:00-12:00 at Fairley House Junior School, 220 Lambeth Rd, London SE1 7JY

Angela Woods and Jon Harris will lead this session on how to collect swarms. Swarming season is upon us and however careful we are, swarms do get away. It's important that we know how to deal with them. Non-members are welcome to come and find out more about LBKA.

Sunday 14th June: Monthly meeting: Queen rearing for the small scale beekeeper

11:00-12:00 at Fairley House Junior School, 220 Lambeth Rd, London SE1 7JY

How to rear queens and other topics. Non-members are welcome to come and find out more about LBKA.

Committee

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with a member of the committee if you have any questions, requests, suggestions (and offers of help)! We are:

- **Chair:** Richard Glassborow, chair@lbka.org.uk
- **Treasurer:** David Hankins, treasurer@lbka.org.uk
- **Secretary:** Emma Nye, admin@lbka.org.uk
- **Education:** Howard Nichols education@lbka.org.uk
- **Membership services:** Aidan Slingsby, services@lbka.org.uk
- **Forage:** Mark Patterson, forage@lbka.org.uk
- **Resources:** Paul Vagg, resources@lbka.org.uk
- **Events:** Emily Abbott, events@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Tristram Sutton, mentoring@lbka.org.uk

Our website is http://www.lbka.org.uk/.