



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

June, 2015

Welcome to this month's newsletter. Congratulations to all eleven LBKA members who passed their BBKA Bee Basic assessment this month! We've several articles about this: one from Howard (who organised the assessment and ran the revision sessions) on page 7, Jonathan (who passed the exam) on page 8 and Martin (who also passed the exam and writes about his first year) on page 9. This is an addition to all the usual features in this monthly newsletter.

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Thanks to all this month's contributors: Richard Glassborow, Cerys Harrow, Martin Hudson, Jonathan Monnickendam, Howard Nichols, Mark Patterson, Emily Scott, Tabitha Stanmore and Vesko Starchikov. This newsletter is a little earlier than usual (because I'm going away on holiday!) – thanks to all the contributors for getting their contributions on time. The newsletter would not be possible without them.

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

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From our Chair

Richard Glassborow
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Many of you will be aware there have been a number of articles in the media recently blaming “trendy middle-class novice beekeepers” for a rise in the number of swarms invading our high streets. I can't say I am aware of any reliable evidence for any of the preceding statements. However, supported or not, the media stories do highlight a very real responsibility, particularly for urban beekeepers.

We all know that swarms are a natural part of the honeybee life cycle. It's how they procreate their colonies. No beekeeper wants their bees to swarm because, for one thing, a swarmed colony will not produce much honey crop. But, for urban beekeepers there are other issues that ought to be of concern too.

First amongst these is the social context. To the uninitiated, swarms can look and sound alarming. In spite of this, whenever I am called to collect a swarm I am always impressed just how tolerant and interested most of the general public are. But we should not ignore those who are genuinely upset by the phenomenon. And, in



Alliums are starting to flower. Photo: Mark Patterson.

some cases swarms can be distinctly disruptive to daily life and can even be costly for businesses.

Another issue is that some of these swarms end up establishing feral colonies, sometimes inside buildings. Their presence may not be a problem in itself and they do no harm to the fabric of buildings but if the entrance is just above a bedroom window for example, bees will stray into the house and the human occupants do not always consider that a privilege. But there is another consideration concerning feral colonies that should be of concern to all: can these become reservoirs of disease and pests for the neighbouring populations of honeybees?

Last month I wrote that we had collected a swarm from Holland Park that we suspected of being feral. Since then we have collected three more from the same place. None of the queens have been marked and all four have proved to be infested with varroa and initial frames of brood are rife with problems and perforated cappings. These are all large primary swarms and if the health of the swarm is this bad it is not hard to imagine the imminent fate of the parent colony. In the mean time drones will be moving freely between all colonies in the area. Not ideal.

So I put it to our community of urban beekeepers that we do have wider responsibilities to consider when it comes to swarm prevention and control. It's not easy; it's nothing to do with our socio-economic background and even the most experienced beekeeper loses swarms if we are honest. But good training, constant vigilance and good practice can help reduce the risks. Perhaps most important of all is a question of attitude: we urban beekeepers need to take swarm control very seriously, for ourselves, for the wider public and for the bees.

Announcements

June Monthly Meeting

Howard will lead June's Monthly Meeting on the subject of **queen rearing for the small scale beekeeper**. This topic was covered last year and several members have requested that it be covered again this year. Do not be put off by the title. It is not complex and there will be something for everyone. As beekeepers we cannot actually rear queens, we simply provide the conditions for the bees to do so. Also, there will not be anything about genetics (this is queen breeding, not queen rearing).

This will be followed by the usual cake, coffee and chat. It will be on **Sunday 14th June** at 11:00 at Fairley House Junior School (220 Lambeth Rd, SE1 7JY).



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

Congratulations on LBKA members passing Bee Basic

Congratulations to our members who all passed their Bee Basic assessment last month: **Claire Wilson, Emma Nye, Mary Walwyn, Martin Hudson, Carel Nell, Paul Vagg, John Mead, Jonathan Monnickendam, Jean Azzopardi, Ben Robards and Sid Hamilton**.

A big thanks also to **Howard** for running the sessions and helping maintain our 100% pass rate! You can find more details on page 7.

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.

If you'd like to sell bees to members, you can advertise them in our "members selling to members" section on page 18.

Lambeth Country Show

As is tradition, we will have a stall at the **Lambeth Country Show** on 18th–19th July. It's a fun weekend where we talk to the public about bees, show them bees in our observation hive and sell products from (or inspired from) the hive.

If you're interested in helping out, please contact Emily on events@lbka.org.uk.

Can you recommend online beekeeping resources and suppliers?

We want to expand the website to list links to **good beekeeping resources** and also to list **beekeeping suppliers** that you recommend. If you've any suggestions, please send them to Aidan on services@lbka.org.uk.



LBKA at the Lambeth Country Show in 2013.

National Bee Unit South Eastern Region Associations Forum

The regional bee inspector has invited LBKA to send two representative to an Associations' Forum.

These meetings aim to develop the relationship between the inspectorate and local beekeeping associations to aid in combating bee diseases and pests. In addition to reviewing exotic pests and risk points in the SE, they will be exploring the level of interest within the region for Bee Health Advisors (aka Disease Liaison Officers).

The provisional date is **Friday 21st August** at the **DEFRA Offices** in London. If you'd interested in attending, please contact Emma on admin@lbka.org.uk.

Bees and pollinators course

"Are you worried about the plight of wild bees and other pollinators? These insects provide a crucial service pollinating crops and wildflowers. Yet there is widespread concern about their decline. This course will teach you how to identify and monitor common pollinators such as bumblebees and hoverflies, how to measure their importance to flowers, and how you can contribute to pollinator conservation"

Cambridge University Institute of Continuing Education are running a weekend course on "Bees, flies and flowers: the ecology of pollination and why it matters" on **26th–28th June** at **Madingley Hall** and costs **£250** which includes lunch, dinner, refreshments and tuition.

More details are at <http://www.ice.cam.ac.uk/bees/>.

Bees for Development Trust bee garden party

Bees for Development – the charity that we support – are having a **Bee Garden Party** on the evening of

1st July, hosted by Martha Kearney. It will be take place in the gardens of Marlborough House in London's Mall – where the borders are being transformed by the Queen's head gardener, Mark Lane, into bee friendly flower beds. There will be a Charity Auction hosted by Bill Turnbull. Tickets will be on sale soon.

Old announcements from May

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

Do you have old honey in bulk? Emily Abbott (07971 453330 or emilyabbott@virginmedia.com) will buy it off you!

Photography project. Olivier (olivierbarjolle@gmail.com) is a French photographer based in London and is looking to photograph beekeepers of all ages, genders and ethnicities.

Want to review "Do Beekeeping: The secret to happy honeybees"? If so contact Aidan on services@lbka.org.uk and I'll arrange for you to receive a review copy.

Old announcements from April

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

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.

May's Monthly Meeting

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

Cerys Harrow
LBKA member

A swarm of bees in May

May's meeting began with a general discussion session about any problems people were currently dealing with. From this it emerged that lots of beekeepers were finding that their bees were making swarm preparations early this year so it was just as well that we were about to be given a practical demonstration of how to collect a swarm.

Intrepid swarm collectors Jon Harris and Angela Woods took us out into the garden to talk us through the process. Using anecdotes from their own immense experience, they outlined the correct procedure and the common pitfalls with capturing a swarm.

Some important themes emerged:



Angela and Jon demonstrating how to collect swarms last year.

Don't panic – do take time to assess the situation and work out what equipment you need.

Take someone with you – if possible it is helpful to have another person who can hold a ladder if needed and field questions from interested passers-by so that you can concentrate on the bees.

Be decisive – once you begin the process you need to work confidently and firmly so that the swarm is taken in one fell swoop (or as near as possible) and the bees are not annoyed and scattered.

Say "no" if you need to – don't attempt to collect a swarm from an impossible situation such as a chimney or airbrick.

There were lots of questions, especially about transporting and housing the swarm once you had caught it. Apparently wine boxes (designed to hold 12 bottles) were an excellent size for collecting a swarm so if you have been looking for an excuse to order a crate of wine...

As always, discussion continued over tea, coffee and cake.

June in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

Swarm control

This is still the main priority if the colony has not yet swarmed. Routine inspections should be made every 7 days to check for queen cells. Make sure you have sufficient spare equipment for swarm control. Upon finding queen cells, you have sufficient time to close up the colony, go home to think things through and collate equipment. You are unlikely to have time to order equipment from a supplier, have it delivered and make it up. For anyone with access to Ted Hooper's "Guide to Bees and Honey", then the Artificial Swarm method is covered extremely well on pages 138–140. The National Bee Unit also has a helpsheet for free download on the Beebase website.

Removing honey

Another seasonal task in early June is removing and processing the spring honey brought in by the bees. This year we have had a fairly good spring and some members are reporting spring honey. If spring honey is removed then keep a watch on stores within the hive.

Collecting swarms

If your bees do swarm or you are called out to collect another swarm then personal and public safety should always be the overriding priority. Do not attempt to climb trees or use ladders beyond your capabilities. A simple order of action may be as follows:

- Make sure they are honeybees.
- If on someone else's land then obtain permission to enter from the landowner. If a branch of the tree needs to be cut then, again, make sure you have permission.
- Ensure any bystanders are moved away to a safe place.
- Put on bee suit and light smoker. Spraying the swarm with a fine mist of water is a refinement which will help keep the swarm in a cluster.
- Place a large sheet (an old bedsheet is ideal) on the ground underneath the swarm.
- After making sure that you are safe then deposit as much of the swarm as you can in a box or large bucket. Try to aim for 90% of the bees as you then have a 90% chance of including the queen.



Indian bean tree blossom.

- Turn box or bucket containing most of the collected swarm upside down on top of the middle of the sheet with a stone or piece of wood wedged between the box (or bucket) and the sheet. This allows access for the remaining bees.
- Come back at dusk to collect up the swarm by removing the stone and tying the sheet around the box. It can then be hived.

Other action to be taken this month includes:

Add supers as necessary, adding another in advance of it being needed by the bees. This may be either a brood super or a honey super, depending upon circumstances.

Check varroa mite drop if not done in April or May. The Beebase varroa calculator (<http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/public/BeeDiseases/varroaCalculator.cfm>) is a useful diagnostic tool.

Enjoy your June beekeeping activities.

June in the Forage Patch

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

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

After a brilliant April and great start to the beekeeping year, May saw cooler temperatures with some unsettled weather that was not conducive to beekeeping or to bees visiting flowers.

This past month we've seen Horse Chestnut, Hawthorn, Cherry, Acers and Oak trees bloom across the capital



Linden trees in Washington are starting to bloom. London limes should be starting to bloom imminently.



A foraging bee brings back horse chestnut pollen.

which – on calm warm days – have provided our colonies with a feast of pollen and nectar. Horse chestnut pollen – easily identified by its blood to brick red colour – has been very noticeable in the hives at the new Holland park apiary where there are many chestnut trees. In my own apiary chestnut pollen is only seen in small quantities. Most of these trees are now going over and our bees will be looking for alternative sources of forage. Exotic trees such as the Fox Glove Tree are starting to bloom. Garden plants like Lavender, Nepeta, Salvias and perennial cornflower are also starting to bloom and will be attractive to our bees.

Last spring everything in my garden seemed to flower at once and blooms were very early. This year the late spring plants in my garden appear to be back to their normal timings with Alliums, Geranium, Foxgloves and Aquilegias just starting to bloom now, These are all popular with honey bees but also very popular with bumble bees.

Very soon we should see the Lime trees flowering which heralds the arrival of the main nectar flow.

As I write this month’s column I am in Washington DC in the USA. I’m here on holiday for 17 days and the weather is glorious – I hope to see some bees this week at the British Embassy. Here in DC their main flow is under way with Sumac, Locust bean tree and Tulip Poplars blooming, there is also a lot of dwarf dogwood growing here and an abundance of honey suckle in flower. Driving along some of the roads here I’ve seen blazes of colourful wild flowers, of which I hope



A range of pollens at our Holland Park apiary.

to get some pictures, if my friend driving allows us to stop!

Our Teaching Apiaries

News from LBKA’s teaching apiaries.

Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk

In last month’s apiary report we included a photograph (reproduced here) of how we strap hives down in Eden to discourage vandalism. Sadly, we are now having to extend the practice to Brockwell apiary, following a similar example of mindless vandalism there.

The LBKA had raised concerns about moving the apiary closer to the public path and it seems our concerns were justified because the sight of it apparently tempted someone to break in to see what would happen if they pushed some hives over! This is not the intended purpose of a teaching apiary but I hope the idiots who thought this was a good idea learned something.

Fortunately the bees were soon all restored to normal life and I would like to thank Jon Harris, Petros Hahladakis and Simon Wilks who all rallied to the cause and put the hives back in order.

Meanwhile, the bees at Eden are performing well so far and this year’s intake of mentees has just arrived. I had thought one colony was queenless following an artificial swarm but when I added two successive test frames of eggs from the parent colony no queen cells were formed. But still I could find no eggs and no queen until this weekend when eggs were clearly visible and we then found the new queen – a month after the artificial



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

swarm! I should have had more patience and faith in the bees' ability to get it right. I am very grateful to Sian, Sarah and Mat, three of last year's mentees who are staying on to assist me in running the apiary. That is a great help, thank you.

Not surprisingly, the swarm apiary has been very busy this past month. Our thanks to Paul Vagg and Karin Courtman, the team responsible for receiving, nurturing and selling-on all the swarms collected once we know they are healthy, viable, have a good temperament and the queen is marked. A lot of work goes into that and we should also remember to thank the swarm collectors without whom our city might end up with more bees than we bargained for! Anyone wanting to buy bees at a good price, please contact Paul, resources@lbka.org.uk.

The apiary at Holland Park is coming on well. This has to be one of the most beautiful apiary settings in London and we hope to be able to show it off to members before too long. In the mean time, there is still plenty to do so volunteers are most welcome. Contact myself on chair@lbka.org.uk or Mark Patterson on forage@lbka.org.uk.

BBKA Basic Assessments

If you've kept bees for at least a year, we would strongly recommend you do your BBKA Bee Basic assessment which qualifies you as a competent beekeeper. We recommend it so strongly that **we will even pay the exam fee for you!** Although you will already know most of the material on the syllabus, Howard's revision sessions will fill in the gaps and this information will help you become a better beekeeper. See Jonathan's and Martin's follow-up articles which follow this one.

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

This year a total of 11 LBKA candidates took part in the BBKA Basic Assessments. The BBKA Basic is both a practical and oral assessment and lasts about 1 hour. Each candidate is asked to assemble a frame, light the smoker (including observing health and safety issues) then open a colony and demonstrate to the examiner that he or she can control the bees whilst, at the same time, answering a few straightforward questions about the colony contents. After going through the brood frames the candidate reassembles the hive and goes on to the 2nd part of the assessment which is answering a series of straightforward questions about beekeeping, bee biology and diseases. The syllabus is broad in its range but not particularly deep. The full syllabus is available for download on the BBKA website and within the education section. Both the BBKA and the LBKA actively encourages its members to take this assessment as it is recognised as a substantial step forward in beekeeping education. Many allotment committees and other public bodies also now require the beekeeper to have this certificate before they are allowed to keep bees on the establishment's land. The BBKA entry fee is £15 and the LBKA will even refund this to all our successful candidates.

The process started back in November with potential candidates being given electronic course notes for light Winter reading. These notes cover the syllabus from beginning to end. Formal study is not required, just a reading of the course notes over the winter months. In March and April we had 3 x 2 hour revision sessions at Roots and Shoots and went through the syllabus item by item. Those candidates who wished for some practical instruction were also catered for. By the last session we had the assessment dates arranged with the assessor and each candidate was allocated a date and time.

So, on to the actual assessments. These were held over 3 successive Saturdays in May at an apiary in

Streatham, south London. Each day up to 4 candidates were assessed.

The 1st session was on Saturday, 2nd May. The weather was good, no rain and warm sunshine. Candidates arrived and departed throughout the day; each candidate arriving 1 hour before the allotted time so ensuring the assessor would not be kept waiting if anyone was delayed. The first day commenced at 10.00am and finished about 3.00pm. It was repeated the following 2 Saturdays.

All 11 candidates passed the assessment. A major reason for this success rate is undoubtedly due to the commitment of all candidates. Another significant reason is the LBKA mentoring programme. Each year more experienced members freely give of their time to teach new members the craft of beekeeping. The newer member (mentee) assists the more experienced beekeeper (mentor) and so starts to learn a variety of skills during the course of a beekeeping season. This provides a solid foundation to the newer beekeeper. The LBKA would like to thank all its mentors for participating in this invaluable service.

On behalf of the LBKA, I would like to thank both of our assessors, Kay Wreford from Sittingbourne and Bob Smith from Medway, Kent. Both travelled a considerable distance and freely gave of their time and expertise so that all candidates could be assessed. It is greatly appreciated by all of us.

Finally, anyone who has kept bees for a minimum period of 12 months and wishing to undertake this assessment in 2016 can register by giving his or her name and email address to any committee member or by sending an email to education@lbka.org. Further details will be given in an autumn newsletter.

Bee Basic: My *Apis Mellifera* Monologue

Jonathan gives his personal experience of doing Bee Basic.

Jonathan Monnickendam
LBKA member

What is the Bee Basic like?

It's a one hour practical test, taken in two parts, the first half is a monologue from the novice beekeeper, explaining the contents of a beehive and what you see. This part is very straightforward and it is hard to call it an exam because all you have to do is to talk through what you see, the bees and, more importantly, what



you see on the frames once you have shaken the bees off the frames. If you miss something the examiner will prompt you, guide you in the right direction and you can be confident that there are no catch questions.

If there is a catch it is that you are doing this with one stranger's beehive and that the second stranger is a master beekeeper.

The second half consists of 30 minutes of questions about bees, their life cycle and disease, which at times will digress into a conversation about aspects of bees that lie well away from the syllabus but are good to know, in my case a discussion as to why you could find drone cells scattered away from the base of the frames. This part is very much fact based and you simply have to know the obvious things about bees, nothing unusual or unexpected.

Oddly and pleasantly for an exam the student will learn about the subject during this exam whilst the time passes quickly. How much preparation do you need to do? You can absorb much of what you need to know from attending the LBKA monthly sessions over a year and reading the BBKA journal. For the practical part you need to be mentored for a year and/or have your own hive. From this you will find that you already have a good grasp of bees, allowing you to take the exam with confidence. The final part is the 3 evening sessions with Howard to fill the gaps and draw the whole together.

Coming at it from another direction you can go online to the BBKA website, look at the syllabus and think '70 topics across 5 sections' with plenty on diseases, most of which you may never see, plenty on queens



and queenless colonies and then honey extraction. Yes, the extent of the content may look daunting – might even put you off – it should not because it is only what you should know if you keep bees.

Why to do Basic?

To ensure that you know enough about bees to avoid damaging or destroying your own colony through neglect or ignorance, to give you a framework within which to assess the state of the frames and any intervention to your colony. This avoids the situation of being (yet) another urban beekeeper who failed to spot swarm cells.

When to do Basic?

Once you have a year's experience of a beehive, your own or of a mentor, possibly two years. By which point you will have the confidence to open a beehive and handle the frames confidently and efficiently, making what you say to the examiner what you would say to yourself when examining a hive. Leave it until your third year and you may miss those swarm cells?

There is a third part of the exam, building a frame which takes little time or effort.

Is it worth doing the next stage, the 7 theoretical exams?

Over to someone else on that one.

The (Mostly) Ups and (Some) Downs of My Beekeeping Year

Martin describes and reflects on his first year of beekeeping. His report is based on the talk he gave at our beginners' course this year.

Martin Hudson
LBKA member

I retired five years ago from a life in public sector housing, but remain busy as an amateur singer with a love of early music. On top of this, I seem to have caught the 'beekeeping bug' about two years ago – alerted by the recent plight of our pollinators by removal of natural habitats, use of harmful pesticides and introduction of imported diseases. I did some on-line research and found the 'Beehaus', which I thought would be a good starter hive (little did I know – but see later!), and then looked for a suitable Introductory Beekeeping Course, and booked with my wife, Angie, onto LBKA's course in April last year. At the same time, I started attending LBKA's monthly meetings, and found a welcoming, inspiring and friendly bunch of people with vast variety of experience and knowledge of bees.

We attended the 2013 Honey Show to look at various suppliers' stalls, and bought beesuits (including a little one for Angie's grandchildren), a smoker, hive tool and several books. Following advice from beekeepers I had met, I realised that the 'Beehaus' was not ideal, and the wooden Dartington hive I saw at that show confirmed the very strong advice I had obtained that I should buy hives which were strong, durable and easy to add to. The Dartington has spindly 1" x 2" legs, which looked like they would buckle if I no more than blew on them, but the made-up Modified Standard National hives sold by Maisemore – also displayed at the Honey Show – impressed me. I decided that – being the hopeless DIY novice that I am (even after 67 years!) – I should pay the (considerable) extra cost of hives and frames made up for me – then at least I could not blame myself if it all went pear-shaped!

We attended the gripping and exciting Course in April last year – run wholly by lots of dedicated LBKA volunteers, passing on a very wide range of knowledge and experience. Most especial was the willingness of three nearby beekeepers to show a crowd of total novices what a colony of bees looked like! We both went away from the course determined to get our own colony.

Currently, most of LBKA's activities (and the location of mentors) are south of the river, so I also joined the local Barnet & District BKA, who, following my com-

pletion of the LBKA course, invited me to attend their weekly apiary inspections with their own new trainees, because travelling to a South London LBKA mentor was less convenient. I have enormously benefitted from being part of two different BKAs, with widely differing views on how to do stuff. The oft-quoted adage: "Ask four beekeepers what the answer to a problem is, and you'll get five answers" seems to be absolutely true – particularly in London!

Angie and I started planning our garden layout to make a space (amongst her vegetables) for two hives (which turned out to be far too small!), and I bought a cheap plastic shed for the equipment (which also proved to be too small!! Angie is using that one as an extra garden shed and I've bought another wooden one which is already full to the brim with bee stuff (see below!).

I was in telephone communication with an LBKA mentor, who sold me one of his nucs which he brought up in June, and we took possession of our first colony. They were beautifully calm, docile bees, and I spent many a long hour/day gazing through binoculars at the entrance (without my beesuit) from about 2 metres away – watching the interactions of the bees as they came and went, and seeing the occasional inspection of the colony by (luckily English!) hornets and wasps. I listened to the sounds they were making, and when I inspected, they were no problem at all. Generally, I did not need to use smoke.

They took some time drawing out the frames from just foundation, and only slowly moved into the one super which I put on to try to encourage them to store honey, but, as I am a long-standing Type 1 diabetic, I was not too bothered about taking a crop. By the end of August, they had filled about 60% of the super, so I decided to leave that on the hive for the winter. I only took a spoonful of honey from one of the combs, and it tasted abso – blooming – lutely lovely! It was very light, clear, and tasted of – well – honey (I can never understand why wine-tasters say that their wine tastes of everything – except grapes!).

Because of my singing activities over the summer, I missed the honey extraction section of the course at Barnet, and that was a pity. My original plan had been to take cut comb from the super frames to avoid the mess of extraction, so I bought lots of plastic boxes for these, but I later realised that this takes away a lot of the bees' hard work, as they have to rebuild comb all over again. When I went to the 2014 Honey Show, I saw a shiny new manual extractor which – surprise surprise – I purchased!

I got conflicting advice about whether to put the super underneath or on top of the brood box, and whether to leave or remove the queen excluder, but in the end I took it off, and left the super on top – effectively making the colony 'a brood and a half' – mistake! I treated them for varroa, and they took 12 litres of 2:1 inverted Ambrosia in late September/early October with which they completely filled the super and much of the brood

frames (so I could have taken that honey after all!). I had a few more peeks at them in October, but then left them to it for the winter – apart from treating in Christmas week with oxalic acid. I weighed the hive (with a digital scale) every couple of weeks throughout the winter, and the weight seemed to be reducing very satisfactorily by a kilo or two each time – fine, I thought.

We had a funny Spring this year! The bees were very active on all the warmer (> 10°C) days during January and February, and they were bringing in pollen by mid-February. Fine, I thought. However, I noticed quite a few 'followers' following me up the garden path each time I went to see them, and they would not leave me alone when I sat watching the hive. Because the temperature was staying doggedly below 13 C, I was resisting the temptation to open them up, however, I was also concerned at what I might find when I did, eventually open them up – which was not until the end of March. I found lots of drone brood filling every available gap, and the bees were very agitated, so much so that I did not get to look at the lower main brood chamber – basically I bottled out!

When I went back a week later, there were hundreds of drones, and the bees had become very aggressive. That was Easter weekend, and everyone was out in ours and the neighbours' gardens on the glorious bank holiday Monday. We started getting knocks on the door from concerned neighbours – some from six houses away, whose kids, dogs and guests were being stung in their gardens. Just at this time, both our immediate neighbours had given birth, so I needed some help! Angela Woods from LBKA kindly came to assess the situation, and told me that she had never encountered such bad-tempered bees, and a decision was made after a few phone calls that they should be culled, because requeening would only have changed the temperament over a few weeks, and moving them away was too dangerous! This was done later that evening by Geoffrye Hood – Chair of Barnet BKA, with a litre of petrol.

The neighbours were remarkably sanguine about the action we took, and most said they were sorry that we had had to get rid of them, however, we decided that we could not continue to keep them in the garden. Unfortunately we do not know why they became this aggressive, but I suspect that there was a dodgy mating of a superceded queen very late last year, and that she became drone-laying and without pheromones early this year.

What I have learnt from my first year of beekeeping are:

- Don't spend loads of money on fancy equipment which you can borrow from your BKA or which you will never use (I have spent nearly £4,000 over the last 18 months, because I did not think first!);
- However tempting it might be, don't get a colony yourself until you have had a full year with a men-

tor – you may think that you’ll manage, but the chances are that you won’t!

- Make sure that, when planning your own site, you leave yourself plenty of space on both sides of each hive you intend to have – and then double it. Then do the same for your storage facility!

Finally – to end of a good note – an Allotment Society in Barnet have agreed to me having a new colony on their site – so all in all, probably a happy end to a sorry saga – which I have rounded off by just passing my Basic Assessment – thanks to the expert coaching of LBKA Education Secretary Howard Nichols – thanks very much Howard, and to Angela, and Jon, and Richard, and Aidan, and everyone else at LBKA for an amazing year!



At the beginning of the month I get the first Acacia honey.

The Bulgarian Beekeeper

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

*Vesko Starchikov
LBKA member*

June is the first month of the summer. At the end of May, the day length is 15 hours and 7 minutes. From 1st June, it gradually increases to 15 hours and 19 minutes, before slowly decreasing after 21st June.

Bee colonies are fully developed, stores are in place and bees continue to forage on Acacia. In the second half of June comes second main nectar flow from the flowering linden *Tilia cordata*, from which bees collect a lot of nectar. There are also many other wild herbs flourishing, from which bees collect much nectar.

The main nectar flow is in full swing and I regularly inspect my hives. Once frames of honey are ready, they must be centrifuged and return to hives again.

Bee colonies often get the urge to swarm. This happens because bees fill most of the honeycomb with nectar and pollen, and the queen does not have enough free space for laying eggs. When the main nectar flow is on but the weather is rainy and unfavourable for flight, bees are inactive and many plan to swarm.

When colonies show signs of preparing to swarm, I take measures to stop it. If – despite the measures taken – swarms get away, I try and collect them and use them to form new colonies.



Linden trees bloom successively, the Large-Leafed linden, Small-Leafed linden and the Silver linden.





May'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.

We're looking for more volunteers to write these in different months. If you'd like to, please email services@lbka.org.uk

*Tabitha Stanmore
LBKA member*

Swarms

Swarming continues to be a big topic of conversation, with a high number of callouts from beekeepers and

the public alike. Mark posted about six swarms he and Richard have collected from a public park. All were probably feral colonies, swarming from local buildings. It is thought that they were a result of poor management in the park's apiary last year, where several colonies must have swarmed.

Mark and Angela both reported being called out several times by beekeepers who had 'no idea what to do with a swarm'. Understandably, frustration has begun to show through! Tom queried whether it was sensible to give swarms to new beekeepers, given that some colonies are just prone to swarming.

Many shared articles from The Telegraph and the Evening Standard running stories blaming 'middle class urban beekeepers' for swarms in towns, culminating in Richard being interviewed on BBC's Breakfast about urban swarms. His advice on how to deal with a swarm as a member of the public will hopefully be heeded in East London, where Mark reported some people trying to remove a swarm from their doorstep by throwing water on them.

Even experienced beekeepers have been having some trouble with swarms. Richard shared a photo of a colony which had swarmed – 5 days after being checked and having no queen cells. Fortunately, the queen was clipped so the colony returned. Main suggestions were that a queen cell was missed on the last inspection.

Yolanda asked for support with a swarm in Croydon, which was too high to reach. Brett asked for a northern beekeeping group to collect a swarm from a friend's house. There is a list of swarm collectors on BBKA's website at http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/find_a_swarm_coordinator.php.

There was even some confusion about whether colonies had or were planning to swarm. Jon found six queen cells, which he assumed were supersedures as they were in the middle of the brood frames. The colony has a one year old queen, the one left behind after last year's swarm. The hive has been slow to start this year so Jon wasn't surprised by supersedure, but was unsure why there were so many cells as the colony didn't look strong enough to swarm. Responses varied, but all agreed the bees are in swarm mode. One suggestion was that they may be swarm cells only, as it is rare to have more than 3 supersedure cells, or a combination of supersedure and swarm cells.

Similarly, Graham requested advice after discovering a load of bees and wild comb under the mesh floor of his hive. His questions were, would these bees be from the hive, which he thought had swarmed two weeks ago, and what to do with the girls under the floor?! Suggestions included that it could be a caste swarm, a virgin queen, or the queen from the hive above. All suggested checking where the brood in – in the wild comb, in the box, or both.

Karen shared photos of a swarm collection in the New



Al in his makeshift beesuit

Forest, where they were unexpectedly discovered under a shrub in the middle of the working day. This 'called for some improvisation in terms of a beesuit. However a hard hat with visor, scarf, spraying suit, rubber gloves, wellies and lashings of gaffer tape did the trick!'

Tom set up a bait hive to attract a swarm, and managed to capture this incredible time lapse video as a result: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uMEfUQvYW20>

Colony loss

Research findings on colony loss in 2014 have now been published. Andrea posted the report from BIP about 2013-14 colony losses in managed hives in the US. Surprisingly, hobby beekeepers reported larger losses than commercial keepers: <http://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s13592-015-0356-z>

Dara shared HiveAlive's post about reported bee losses in the US – over 40%, with an unexpected increase in summer losses.

An International Bee Research Association post was



Thomas' Time Lapse video: from the first scout bees...



... to the whole swarm!

shared with a breakdown of the reports published thus far in 2015 on bee losses, and the media's reaction. The reports show that global bee decline is undeniable, and that although there are signs that the decline is slowing, at least 9.1% of the bee species in Europe are under threat of extinction.

In more positive news, Mark shared an article from the US Whitehouse, announcing new steps to promote pollinator health: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2015/05/19/announcing-new-steps-promote-pollinator-health>. Meanwhile, Andrea shared a BBC article reporting 50 bee species recorded in Newcastle.

However, an article shared from IBRA highlights that pollinator seed mixes tend to favour bumblebees and not honey or solitary bees.

In more publishing news, Andrea shared IBRA's post, announcing that the latest issues of Bee World and the Journal of Apicultural Research have gone to proof and will soon be published by the Taylor & Francis Group.

Bee disease

Derman shared a video of a friend's bees in Cannes, France, and asked for advice on their behaviour. All agreed it was poisoning, probably from the insecticide used in gardens and golf courses in the region. Derman suggested it could be chlorine from local swimming pools, but this was suggested as not being the issue as it is not harmful in low quantities. Gustavo asked for advice on a colony he found in compost heap beside a bumblebee nest, possibly covered in waxmoth. Most agreed it was waxmoth, but that little could be done at this late stage.

Bee conundrums

Mark posted about a skinny queen who keeps getting through the queen excluder and laying in the supers. Suggestions for how to resolve the issue included adding more supers towards the end of the season, putting the brood box at the top, using an old French style of crown board with holes at the sides, and just keeping the queen as a breeder.

Jochen tried a Bailey comb change on his colony, which is small and weakened in the winter. The bees are refusing to move up and are clinging to the open mesh floor. Thomas went to have a look, and posted some suggestions including sagging mesh which has opened a new entrance to the hive, or a virgin queen keeping close to the mesh. This would cause the bees to create new comb. All agreed that introducing new comb when a colony is weak is too much extra strain.



Waj posted a photo of a feral colony in Bhutan

Nucs

Martin shared photos and an update on a three frame nuc, which he took out of a colony and left one queen cell. Checking a week later, Martin found a second cell he had missed! Daisy and Martin cut it out to use elsewhere, 'as mum is a cracking queen'. But as the queen was about to emerge, held the cell shut until a three frame nuc from three different colonies was made. Sadly the experiment was unsuccessful, and the emerged queen was later killed by the new nuc.

Angela posted advice from the National Bee Unit about buying nucs, recommending that new beekeepers take an experienced keeper with them when buying a nuc, and always inspect it thoroughly before purchase.

Miscellaneous

Olivier posted regarding a portrait photography project he is running on urban beekeepers. Those interested in getting involved can contact olivierbarjolle@gmail.com. All volunteers will receive a copy of their portrait.

Hannah thanks everyone for supporting her Pitch to Rich for her growing business, Hiver. You can find more information here: <http://www.virginmediabusiness.co.uk/pitch-to-rich/grow/hiver-beers/>



What happens to bees as they develop. Unfortunately, varroa is now usually part of this - can you see it? Incredible photography from https://www.ted.com/talks/anand_varma_a_thrilling_look_at_the_first_21_days_of_a_bee_s_life

Angela shared an article from the Evening Standard about helping to save honey bees by introducing more hives into London. Most disagreed with the article and there was some scepticism the motivation of the article.

Mark shared photos of a successful colony, busy collecting pollen after being shook swarmed 9 days before:

Eddna asked how to fill her 80 hives from the 5 currently filled. There was a mixed reaction from the Face-

book community, some giving advice on how to split the colonies, others advised sticking to the 5 hives until Eddna has more experience. All agreed it would take several years to fill all 80, even if collecting feral swarms.

Jon and several others shared a video about what happens to bees as they develop: https://www.ted.com/talks/anand_varma_a_thrilling_look_at_the_first_21_days_of_a_bee_s_life.

Norman shared IBRA's suggestion to read Oliver Field's

'Field Notes on Queen Rearing', now that the season is in full swing.

Corrine posted about a public meeting regarding a planned Garden Bridge, which may affect biodiversity and green space in the area.

Adventures in Beeland: What's flowering now

Emily's regular guest article from her excellent blog: <http://adventuresinbeeland.com/>.

Emily Scott
LBKA member

It's been a while since I've done a post about what's flowering now. Today at the London Wetland Centre I found plenty of flowers, so it seemed like a good time. Most people who go to the Centre come away with photos of ducks, swans or otters, of course I managed to get bees instead!

Red clover is just coming out now and I think this is a common carder bee, the only common UK bumblebee that is mostly brown or ginger. The first time red clover flowers it has too long a flower for a honey bee to collect the nectar, but red clover which has been cut and then grown back has a flower short enough for a honey bee to reach the nectar. Ted Hooper writes in 'Guide to Bees and Honey' (5th ed, 2010) that it flowers from mid July to the end of August – which just shows how much our climate is changing.

Some herbs – always popular with bees – are start-



Carder bee on red clover.



Bumblebee on thyme.



This blue star-like plant is borage, a great favourite with bees. Lots of creamy pollen in the baskets. As males don't have to collect pollen, this must be a female. Another Early bumblebee?



Garlic chives. You can't see from the photo but bees were all over these, including a magnificently huge and fluffy common Carder bee.



Dog roses are popular with honey bees.



I saw all kinds of bees working the yellow flag irises that lined the watersides.



I didn't see any bees on these garden poppies but included them anyway because they're so beautiful.



I keep seeing these lovely clusters of white flowers everywhere – what are they? (Thanks LindyLou and Lucy Garden for identifying this as the UK's native viburnum, Guelder Rose.)



A pretty impressive insect hotel.



*And what about this lollipop-shaped pink one? (Thanks LindyLou for identifying this as *Bistorta officinalis*, commonly known as bistort or European bistort.)*

ing to flower. These little pinky white flowers are thyme.

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.

Yolande Lee has 10 assembled Hoffman brood (DN4) frames with foundation for sale. £15. yolandelee@hotmail.co.uk.

Upcoming events

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.

Sunday 12th July: Monthly meeting: Honey extraction and labelling.

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

Honey extraction and labelling: how, advice and regulation. Non-members are welcome to come and find out more about LBKA.

Saturday 18th to Sunday 19th July: Lambeth Country Show

Brockwell Park, Dulwich Road, SE24 0PA

Come and see us at our stall at the Lambeth Country Show.

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/>.

