



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

April, 2017

Welcome to April's newsletter! Martin (as well as proof-reading) has been taking advantage of the spell of relative beekeeping quietness up to now by attending lectures and other events – see page 12. The beekeeping season is really starting to take off... evidenced by the offers in the “marketplace” on page 16 and the activity at LBKA's apiaries on page 11. The swarming season will soon be upon us so if you're interested in receiving a swarm for your apiary, ask to be added to [our list](#). You can also use this list to find people to take bees off your hands. Also in this issue... Richard reflects on forage availability in London and Mark gives us his usual comprehensive account of London forage at this time of year on page 8. Natalie recalls last month's meeting on page 4, Howard reminds us of what we should be doing in the apiary this month on page 7 and Eugene summarises what people were talking about on Facebook on page 13. And Emily (Scott) has had the same idea as Martin, reporting on some of what went on at the Middlesex Federation Day on page 14.

From our Chair	1
Announcements	2
Last month's Monthly Meeting: Swarm control	4
A day at the races	4
April in the Apiary	7
Focus on Forage	8
LBKA Apiaries	11
A Newby-ish Beekeeper in Winter	12
Facebook (In)digest(ion)	13
Adventures in Beeland: Middlesex Federation Day	14
Members' marketplace	16
Upcoming events	16
Committee	17

Thanks to this month's contributors: **Natalie Cotton, Eugene Fahy, Richard Glassborow, Petros Hahladakis, Howard Nichols, Ted Parkes, Mark Patterson, Emily Scott and Vlad Zamfir**. Thanks as usual to Martin Hudson for proof-reading it.

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From our Chair

Richard Glassborow
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I am aware that not all members use the very active [London Beekeepers Association Facebook Group](#) (not be confused with the less active but exclusive [members'-only LBKA-Forum](#)) and I assume not all members and other “followers” of LBKA read the News Letter cover to cover but I would like to attempt to improve the chances of sharing an important question recently raised on LBKA Facebook by member, Angela Woods, after she had inspected colonies she keeps in Central London. Her question was posed from the bees' perspective, “is central London becoming unsustainable for honey bees?” It is a good question.

Angela was reflecting on the differences she has seen following moving hives 2 miles further into very central London. The move was 3 years ago and the differences include speed and strength of spring build-up and re-



Apple blossom in East Finchley. Photo: Aidan Slingsby.

sulting impact on honey yields – calculated to be down 75% in her experience.

Other members corroborate low yields in central London and cases of starvation. Many have commented on the lack of suitable flowers in the city. But there also seem to be beekeepers claiming quite decent yields. (Typical of beekeepers – can't agree about anything).

The LBKA committee have been aware for some time that for all its Victorian-inspired open space, London's habitats are in fact very varied especially with respect to suitability for pollinators and we are currently trying to build a better, evidence-based picture of how things are, area by area, in the hope that some of the problems can be addressed.

We have a pretty good idea where the forage is (thanks to the Greenspace Information for Greater London service; GiGL) and we have mapped the distribution of registered colonies (thanks to DEFRA). As a broad generalisation, across London it seems that colony density tends towards being inversely proportional to forage availability. This is obviously a concern and the square mile is of particular concern.

We also know that the quantity and quality of natural habitat in London is in decline. A significant number of the estimated 3.8 million gardens are losing their front portions to paving for free off-street parking and designer-led fashions seem to favour hard landscaping, ornamental grasses and plants that are not particularly suitable for pollinators¹. Today's developers are not creating natural habitat and local authorities are not requiring it. Household, landowners, developers, local authorities and the mayor's office all have a part to play in averting further habitat loss and improving remaining habitats. New developments should once again embrace the open space ethos which so characterises London.

To further reinforce this argument for environmental improvement through planting, we also propose to our members the idea of a London honey yield survey. This would complete the picture and perhaps offer proof that bees and flowers go together (as if it should be necessary to prove that!). I know there is the BBKA survey but I suspect I am not alone in being guilty of failing to enter data. This is often because London's harvesting is often later than other areas and we simply do not know how much we have taken until the end of the summer, not the beginning.

We are not really in a position to carry out a full-scale rigorously scientific study but with our membership's help and cooperation we do have enough expertise to move the knowledge base forward sufficiently to benefit bees, beekeepers and the public in general. Watch this space and if we ask you for information I hope you will oblige.

¹I even saw a van outside my neighbour's house recently proudly announcing the firm as "Fake Grass" – Martin Hudson's editor's comment

Bees hold the public imagination but we need a more informed and subtle approach to "helping" honey bees. A better understanding of these relationships is important because public (and corporate and political) interest in bees, and the desire to "help" them by keeping more colonies, seems relentless.

LBKA is trying to raise public awareness that simply having more bees does not help bees. In fact the unintended consequences of increasing colony density beyond forage availability could be even worse than poor honey yields: honey bees are not only competing against each other but are probably out-competing wild pollinator species too. But if the choice is between fewer bees or more flowers, let's try more flowers.

Finally, urban bees are not really part of the commercial food chain but I would argue that what's good for bees is good for humans too. Forage appropriate plants (usually involving flowers) brighten up the urban environment and that makes people happy.

Announcements

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

Next Monthly Meeting

This month meeting has already happened. See next month's newsletter for a write-up of the nose-microscopy that went on there.

Next month will be our special **Bee Health Day at Walworth Garden** (206 Manor Pl, Braganza St, SE17 3BN; note the different venue to usual) on **14th May**. Mark, Howard and Richard will talk about recognising, mitigating against and clearing up after bee diseases. It will include a hive inspection. Due to the hands-on nature of the day, we require people to [register in advance](#). We will run the same session in the morning and the afternoon and are limiting numbers to 20 per session, prioritising those who have bees. Members-only please.

Mentoring

*"In the long history of humankind
(and animal kind too)
those who learned
to collaborate and
improvise most effectively
have prevailed."*

*Charles Darwin
(1809 – 1882, English naturalist)*

Mentoring season will be starting shortly. If you are interested in becoming a mentor please contact Elliot at mentoring@lbka.org.uk. Full support provided.

Cancelled Winter Lecture

Apologies to members who came for the Winter Lecture on Bee Venom only to find that there was no speaker.

It turned out that there was an emergency at work – related to the subject on which he was speaking(!) – which meant that he could not attend at short notice. He has apologised. We understand, and plan to invite him back on another occasion.

Survey of UK beekeepers

A group of researchers at Liverpool's John Moores University are investigating contemporary issues related to beekeeping. They're asking for our members to complete their [online survey](#). This short survey (15 questions) is designed for both hobby and professional beekeepers. The information collected is anonymous and will not identify you in any way. Your extended comments are particularly appreciated, as they will help enrich the overall quality of the study.

If you're interested in the findings, leave your email details at the end of the survey.

The principal researcher's contact details are:
Dr. Abel D. Alonso
Email: A.Alonso@ljmu.ac.uk
Telephone: 0151-231-4755.

Do you want bees?

If **you'd like bees** from any of our members, either as nucs or swarms [please sign up to our list](#). Please only ask to be added if you are experienced enough to receive bees and indicate whether you'll take swarms and/or nucs. Your phone number and first part of your postcode will go on the list and will be available to all members. Note that swarms are usually only available at very short notice.

If you have **spare bees**, either as a swarm, nuc, or colony, you can use this list to find people to supply. Please first check how comfortable the member is with receiving bees! Bees may be offered as swarms (where the origin, health and temperament may not be known) or nucs (where the beekeeper has nurtured a miniature colony of bees, hopefully to [to the BBKA standard](#)). For swarms, BBKA insurance requires that we don't sell swarms that we collect, so about £20 for out-of-pocket expenses is reasonable. For nucs a price of £100-140 is generally reasonable.

An advantage of buying from members is that the bees are local and the member will be able to tell you about their temperament, but you won't necessarily know

when you'll get them. If you're in a hurry, consider buying bees from a reputable supplier.

Collecting swarms

Like last year, we have a WhatsApp group and an email list for people that collect swarms or are interested in attending a swarm collection. If you haven't collected swarms before, this is a chance to find out what's going on and how to observe or help. Email services@lbka.org.uk if you'd like to be added/removed to both or either of these.

Guest blog?

We currently have a permanent "guest blog" (p14). Emily Scott's excellent blog always makes a good contribution to the newsletter. However, we would like to rotate this a bit. Does any other member have a blog that they would like to feature here? Let me know on services@lbka.org.uk

Old announcements from March

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

Beekeeper wanted: A Community Garden in Fulham are looking for a beekeeper to look after their two hives. Contact admin@lbka.org.uk if you can help.

New leaflets LBKA has two new leaflets, one on the types of bees found in London and one on how to help honey bees. They are available for [free download](#) and we can supply printed copies for public outreach activities.

Engraved hive tool: We presented Howard with a hive tool to commemorate his achievement of becoming a Master Beekeeper.

Surrey Shield: LBKA has been awarded the Surrey Shield for outstanding performance in the 2016 BBKA Basic assessments. Last year we had the highest number of members as a proportion of membership passing this assessment.

Old announcements from February

Howard is a Master Beekeeper, the highest of the BBKA qualifications!

Old announcements from January

2017 BBKA Basic Assessment. LBKA encourages its members to take the BBKA basic assessment. If you've been managing bees for more than 12 months, we will help. Please confirm by email to Howard on education@lbka.org.uk for more details.

Seeds Are you able to sell any seeds? Perhaps you know of somewhere that would sell them? Talk to Mark

on forage@lbka.org.uk if you'd like some seeds to try and sell.

NBU's 2016 Annual Reports are out and you can [download them](#).

Do you have any announcements?

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

Last month's Monthly Meeting: Swarm control

What happened last month.

Natalie Cotton
admin@lbka.org.uk

The enduring memory from my first full year of beekeeping was watching approximately 40,000 of 'my' bees abscond from their hive to a nearby tree. It gave me something to talk to the neighbours about for the rest of the year, and reinforced the importance of swarm control! LBKA dedicates a meeting to the topic each spring, and as usual this year's meeting was extremely well attended. Howard took the attendees through a detailed and insightful discussion on swarm control. The highlights are below.

Swarm control and swarm prevention are fundamentally different. Prevention is the attempt to stop the bees from going into swarm mode and making queen cells. Swarm control comes into play once you've seen queen cells within a hive. By this stage, the bees are already in swarm mode. Howard advised all keepers to minimise the factors that trigger swarming: make sure the bees have room in the hive, that the hive is well ventilated and gets some sun. Keep an eye out for 'play cups', the almost spherical, half size queen cells. Often these are bees practicing for making the larger, peanut shell shaped queen cells. If the bees are polishing the insides of play cups with propolis or moving larvae in to them, it's an early sign they're preparing to swarm.

When a colony goes into swarm mode, there are several methods of swarm control. LBKA teaches the artificial swarm method as it's considered the most foolproof. In theory, it mimics a swarm by separating the queen and flying bees from the majority of the brood and the nurse bees. Howard advised keepers to have plenty of equipment ready going in to the spring – it's generally

too late to order a nuc or new brood box once you've found a queen cell!

An artificial swarm is carried out as follows:

- Move the existing brood chamber to one side, and place a nuc or new brood box on the original site.
- Locate the queen from the original colony. Put her and a frame of brood (without a queen cell!) in to the new box.
- Fill the remainder of the new box with drawn comb or new foundation. The foraging bees will return to this new box throughout the day.
- Go through the original brood box and destroy all but one or two of the queen cells. Howard recommends keeping an unsealed queen cell, as you can check that the virgin queen is alive and surrounded by plenty of royal jelly.
- Put a queen excluder under the floor of the original colony, as an extra protection measure. Bees swarming without the queen will generally return to the hive – hence why many keepers clip their queens.
- This method is covered in more detail in many beekeeping books.

If you find yourself in the position of swarm control having failed, then other members of LBKA are on hand to collect swarms – some with ladders! Contact the [BBKA swarm service](#) in the first instance.

A day at the races

Aidan Slingsby
services@lbka.org.uk

Ascot had their **Spring Family Raceday** earlier this month. As well as the horse races, there was a variety of stalls, demos and other activities. LBKA was commissioned to run a stall to provide information on forage, to show live bees, to provide honey tasting and to offer candle rolling. LBKA stalls have been frequent in recent weeks, so Richard and Mark were particularly well practiced at putting on a good stall. And a good stall it was too. I was just there for the ride.

It was an early start on a cold but sunny morning. We found our pitch, nestled between the flower arranging stall and foraging stall (for human foodstuffs). The forager had an impressive array of foraged herbs and mushrooms from the local area that he found when he arrived. He also extolled the virtues of using dandelion petals to flavour cake, which I'd never thought of trying (and still haven't tried). We had other neighbours too. The wood turning stall allowed people to try turning wood using a footpedal-powered lathe. The willow wigwam stall promoted living structures. And we were just across from the demonstration area where we could



The stall, with (from left to right) Mark's (beautifully-painted) observation hive, endoscope/microscope, seeds, honey, honey tasting.



Looking for the queen.



Ascot announcing our stall.

eavesdrop on the falconry demonstrations, sheep-dog demonstrations and ferret racing.

After correcting the misplaced apostrophe on the “learn everything you need to know about bees” sign we were ready to set up the stall. We had Mark’s observation hive, Mark’s digital endoscope/microscope for looking at bits of bee and varroa mites, plenty of seed packets, our [new glossy leaflets](#), honey tasting, bee suits to try on, and candle rolling.

Once the public were allowed in, it was non-stop until the main races started. Even during the races, we had a steady stream of visitors, with a surge just before closing time. Some of late visitors had clearly been enjoying the Pimms and we got some good questions.

The candle-making was incredibly popular with the children... and quite a few adults too. Ascot funded us to provide it, so we offered as a free activity. The little plastic bee broaches that we use to pin the candle together to finish it off were very popular. People were sad when we ran out – someone even started crying. But even without these broaches, the candles were still viable and many came back for more (and more). One politely asked if he could make candles for a whole list of his family members and many of the candle rollers were very inventive, sticking different coloured bits of wax to the candles to make more interesting patterns. By the mid-afternoon, hundreds of candles after we started, we



Richard and Mark setting up



Candle rolling setup.

ran out of wick so had to close the candle-making for the day.

As usual, the observation hive was a constant source of intrigue. The queen was pretty elusive for most of the day, but for about half an hour she came round to the front of the observation hives and started to very obviously lay eggs, before retreating to her elusive spot on the dark side of the hive.

The honey tasting was popular. We mainly offered it to demonstrate how different hives in a single apiary can have different tasting honey. We had honey to sell for those who wanted it, but people were not so interested in buying the honey, probably because we were not very local to the area and perhaps also because we were charging our usual London prices.

It was a busy day, but also a chance for us to see what this horse-racing thing is all about. The horses surely had more of an idea how to race than the ferrets, who 'raced' without much urgency.

April in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

It is in April that the colony population substantially increases and drones will start to appear later in the month. There should normally be sufficient available forage for the bees to be self-sufficient if the weather holds good but the beekeeper must keep an eye on stores. The most important job for the beekeeper this April, given the weather, is to ensure that the colony is not starving. If it is still too cold for a proper inspection and if in doubt then feed.

Other actions to be taken this month normally include the following:

Mouseguards: Remove mouseguards and replace with a clean, sterilised entrance block if not already done in March.

Mark the queen: If the queen is unmarked then this is an ideal time to find and mark her. The colony is now going to continue to expand in numbers up until July whereupon it will start to contract. Swarm control will be considerably easier with a marked queen.

Colony build up: Is the colony continuing to build up? A significant benefit of keeping colony records is that the number of frames of brood is recorded.

First full inspection: If not done in March then the first full inspection and spring cleaning of the hive

should be carried out. The best way to spring clean is to have a spare broodbox and floor and simply transfer all frames and bees into a new brood box then place this on the new floor. The old box and floor can then be taken away for cleaning. From then on regular inspections should be made.

When inspecting a colony, 5 questions should be asked and actions taken if appropriate.

1. **Is the queen present and laying?**

You do not need to find the queen. If there are eggs and these are only 1 egg per cell, or newly hatched larvae, then this is evidence that she was in the hive and laying 3 or 4 days ago.

2. **Has the colony enough room?**

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

3. **Are there any queen cells?**

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

4. **Are there signs of disease?**

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

5. **Are there enough stores until the next inspection?**

The equivalent of 2 full National brood frames is regarded as more than sufficient at this time of year, even if there is a serious and prolonged downward turn in the weather. Nectar does not usually rise in UK indigenous plants until the temperature reaches 18C. So, beware of low stores.

We have passed the Equinox and Spring is now underway. The beekeeping season is with us for the next 6 months. I hope everyone enjoys themselves during the period. It can be challenging at times but extremely rewarding. Please do come along to our monthly meetings to share your experiences and get help or suggestions with any of your queries. I hope your bees prosper and produce lots of honey for you. Happy Beekeeping for 2017!



Anemone blanda.



Male Andrena bee on lesser celandine

Focus on Forage

Mark's tells us what's in flower at this time of year.

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

Following a very mild March the forage this season appears to be more advanced than recent springs, even in comparison to last year's very mild winter and warm start to the year. 2017 has started cold and chilly but in late March, the weather has warmed up considerably. So much so that I experienced my first attempt at a swarm during the last week of March and already the new queens have emerged and unbelievably appear to have been mated and are laying!!!

During the first week of April many of our true heralds of spring had already begun to flower across the city. **Cherry Laurel** (*Prunus laurocerasus*) an ever-green shrub whose flowers are a useful source of spring forage have been out in bloom since mid-March – 2-3 weeks earlier than last year. Whilst manning the LBKA stall at Ascot race course on the 2nd April, I



Bird cherry



Choisya aka mock orange



Forget-me-not



Rosemary



Apple

saw many **Andrena Mining bees, honey bees, bumblebees, hoverflies, queen wasps** and **queen Hornet** nectaring on the blooms of these tall shrubs growing around the car park.

Damson, Plum, Gage, and other stone fruits have largely flowered and gone over already as have crocus, daffodils and snow drops. My **flowering currant** – normally just blooming now – is almost over already, meanwhile **bluebells** are coming into flower. Bluebells may be visited by honey bees and can produce a honey crop but they are also popular with some of the longer tongued solitary bees and Garden Bumble Bee (*Bombus hortorum*). Most of the **bluebells** found growing in our gardens and sadly in many of our wilder places are the larger invasive **Spanish bluebell**. You can tell the two species apart by the way that the individual bells hang on the flower stalk. In English bluebells, the bells all hang on the same side. In the Spanish bluebells they hang at different angles all around the stalk. They also have green to blue pollen whilst English bluebells have a creamy coloured pollen. Bluebells frequently hybridise and these offspring can be difficult to differentiate.

In two of my local parks, pretty pink **Cuckoo Flower** (*Cardamine pratensis*) forms carpets of flowers alongside **primroses** and **sweet violets**. This dainty little pink flower is a true sign that spring 'proper' has arrived. It's an important nectar plant for many pollinators and the main food plant for the larva of the **Orange Tip Butterfly**, a species sadly in decline.

White and red dead nettles, dandelions, coltsfoot,



Yellow archangel



Box honeysuckle. A valuable source of forage if not clipped neat in early spring

primulas, rosemary, wood anemones, green alkanet, comfrey, lungwort, cherry, choisia, wall flowers and many varieties of **apple** and **pear** are now in full bloom, putting on spectacular shows of spring colour. **Ceanothus, pyracantha** and **cotoneaster** are starting to bloom in some areas. This is also very early. Pyracantha and cotoneaster don't usually bloom until late April and early May.

Last year in my garden I planted some **Yellow Archangel plants** given to me by a friend. These pretty foliage plants in the dead nettle family sport masses of lemon yellow flowers which **Hairy Footed Flower Bees** and **Bumble Bee** queens love. The plants have done a little too well and have covered the length of my hedge since planting last spring. They can be very invasive forming large carpets and are not suitable for planting in wild areas but perfect for under a garden hedge or shady spot. The bees are currently feasting on the blooms.

In wooded areas **lesser celandine** is forming carpets of yellow which attracts small solitary bees. This plant is unusual in the buttercup family (*Ranunculaceae*) as it is one of the few buttercups that is attractive to bees. Most other *Ranunculus* have nectar which contains the toxin protoanemonin which bees cannot digest and can lead to poisoning. Lesser celandine however is popular with many of our early solitary bees and occasionally honey bees. This past few weeks I have seen many of the **Micro Andrena** solitary bees feeding on the golden yellow flowers.

Other important sources of forage this month are the **willows**. Many of the willows I've seen have already been and gone but some still sport copious amounts of sulphur yellow pollen. If your honey bees are returning to the hive dusted in yellow, they will most likely have been visiting willow. It's not just honey bees that visit willow. Many bumble bees and *Andrena* bees will also collect willow pollen. Unlike the earlier flowering catkins of Alder and Hazel willow will also produce nectar. Other trees coming into bloom right now include **field maple, sycamore, poplar** and **ash** (a species which scientists have recently predicted will likely become extinct within our life time due to Ash Die-back disease and the invasive **Emerald Bark beetle**).

On 3rd April, I saw my first **horse chestnut** blossom of the year outside Bow Road Tube station. This is very early indeed and we should be ready for a strong spring nectar flow if the warm weather continues. **Chestnut** produces very distinctive dark brick red pollen which honey bees will collect with enthusiasm. **Chestnuts** are one of the best examples of how plants communicate with their pollinators; the individual blooms of the flower stalk change colour – or "inflorescence" – as they are fertilised to inform the bees that they need not bother to visit that particular bloom. When they come out in flower watch them and look out for the change in colour.



Canary bird rose

Other trees coming into bloom will include cherry, before mentioned Apple and Pear. **Hawthorn** appears well advanced this year and already I've heard reports of Hawthorn in bloom in South London.

In rural areas **oil seed rape** is now coming into bloom and will blanket vast areas of the countryside in swathes of yellow well into mid-May. During a visit to the Yorkshire Beekeeping Association Spring Convention on 26th March, I passed many fields sporting a patchwork of yellow as the crop was coming into flower. Rape is one of the most frequently grown crops in the UK and the source of much of our vegetable oil for cooking as well as oil for cosmetics and biofuel. Beekeepers either love it or hate it for it can produce an abundance of honey but the grainy texture and tendency to crystallise rock hard in the comb are a drawback. Beekeepers wishing to make a rape honey crop need to feed their bees from mid-February onwards to ensure spring build-up to establish a strong colony in time for the crop flowering. Beekeepers in areas with rape not wanting the hassle of dealing with a quick to crystallise honey can use the rape flow to build up their colonies ready for the main summer flow later on.

All this early forage means colonies are building up fast and weekly inspections of our bee hives will be necessary from now until high summer if we want to catch a colony intending to swarm before the bees leave. Already some of my hives have 3 supers above a queen excluder. Already these supers are filling up with honey and with luck I may get a good spring crop this year.

LBKA Apiaries

Vlad has coordinated articles from all four of LBKA's apiary managers, giving us a comprehensive summary of what shape they are in as we approach the new bee-keeping year.

Vlad Zamfir, Petros Hahladakis, Richard Glassborow and Ted Parkes
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March in the LBKA Apiaries

Brockwell

Petros Hahladakis

The two hives that are left at Brockwell have come out very strong from winter. As we are still restricted by the type of manipulations we can do, we gave the queen more room to expand by going brood + half as we need to wait for the follow up visit by the Seasonal Bee Inspector (SBI) before doing a shook-swarm to get the bees on a new set of comb (shock-swarm is the preferred method of comb replacement if bees may have been exposed to EFB).

The supers that we added onto each hive two weeks ago with brand new comb have now been drawn out with the frames in the middle about to start being capped. The Brockwell apiary is in a lucky spot with plenty of forage around, so hopefully it will be a good crop once we get the all clear from the SBI to start expanding again.

Eden

Richard Glassborow

We have completed first inspections on all four colonies. They appear to have survived winter well. The good weather has not synched so well with our availability since but we have had a chance for a quick second look at two of them: they are building up well and clearly bringing in more food than they are using. They still have some of their Autumn honey left too. So that's one potential source for concern ticked off. Now we have to work out when to carry out shook swarms (which is our main weapon in varroa control). The weather is not really reliable enough yet but at Eden we are also constrained by needing fully developed colonies for the training courses at the end of April and beginning of May. So, it should happen about now. Much later and they may not have time to recover; or we find ourselves artificially swarming them just before the courses. The other two colonies we are feeding syrup as their stores looked light on first inspection. They will be fine. Several of the current mentees at Eden have now got or are about to get their own bees. It is really good

news that I have failed to put them off. I wish them luck on their new adventure and of course the mentoring continues as long as members need it.

Holland Park

Ted Parkes

Finally weather and time permitted a full inspection of the Holland Park hives. Three of the four hives are doing very well and all three have substantial brood and good numbers. The fourth hive is queenless. All the hives have new stores of both pollen and nectar and some remaining stores. Worth noting in the three queen-right colonies is the arrival of drone brood. Will have to keep an eye on those colonies and head off any indication of swarming. Looking to shook swarm at least one of them. Last season's shook swarms took a very long time to recover and I attribute that to the timing and the fact they weren't as strong as they should have been. This year the three hives are much stronger and all three are very similar in strength and development. It will be interesting to keep detailed records comparing a shook swarmed hive with a non shook swarmed hive and a colony that will be artificially swarmed. I'll look at artificially swarming one of the hives with the queenless colony. There are still a good number of bees in that fourth hive to help support and contribute to the new colony. At this point I am confident that this season the Holland Park apiary will be able to contribute and become an active teaching location.

Mudchute

Vlad Zamfir

March has had quite a few days of good weather so the bees could go ahead and get both fresh pollen and nectar (which they can use to dilute honey stores since honeybees can only metabolise a 50% sugar solution). Looking at the hives in Mudchute on one of those days, I noticed that only one of the three was fairly active while the other two were pretty quiet. When I did the first inspection, I found out why: the smallest colony died out, as I feared it would, and the other one had quite a few bees (around 4 seams) but no queen or brood. The last one was doing well, with plenty of bees, brood and stores. I've even added an empty super as they were bringing in nectar and I wanted to reduce crowding as well as ensure the brood chamber does not become honey-bound.

I decided to insert a frame of eggs from the queen right colony in the queenless one and see if they will build any queen cells. They did but a bit too late to have larvae of the appropriate age to make a queen out of. I suspect I caught them on the brink of getting laying workers and the frame of brood reversed the process. A week later I decided to graft some day-old larvae into the queen cups that the queenless colony had built and I was pleased a week later to find a couple of sealed queen

cells. Now, I realise I'm being a bit optimistic thinking sexually mature drones are around at the beginning of April but it was either this or letting them die out / uniting them (and I'm unsure about their health – why did the queen die? – so would not do the latter).

Mudchute now has 1 colony that is queen-right but is producing a few too many drones for comfort (I'm wondering if she's failing or she's just a strain that makes a lot of drones in spring) and one colony that's work in progress. Hopefully during April both colonies will make enough progress to allay my fears.

A Newby-ish Beekeeper in Winter

Martin Hudson

LBKA member

I am starting my third season as a beekeeper, having attended LBKA's introductory course in April 2014. Living in North London, I came across the LBKA course by chance, looking up 'beekeeping in London' on the web, because I was interested in maintaining the bee population, and found and booked on LBKA's course. I have been lucky that I have since been a member of both LBKA and Barnet & District Beekeepers, benefiting from varied activities and approaches, and meeting a wide variety of interesting people in both Associations.

Calamity

I obtained my first colony in July 2014 (maybe too soon!), and whilst I enjoyed watching them (in my shirt sleeves) in my garden for the remainder of that year, I was not aware that they, probably, superceded the queen at the end of that season, the new queen probably mating poorly with one or two rogue north-London drones, and ended up producing an ultra-aggressive colony – stinging neighbours without provocation over the first fine weekend of 2015 – which happened to be a very warm Easter weekend. There was a 3-month old baby on one side of us, and a 3-week old on the other – so two experienced beekeepers, one from London and one from Barnet (thanks Angela and Geoff!), visited and agreed that we could not save the colony, and they had to be destroyed.

Prolific

Despite this upset, I obtained my Basic Assessment later in 2015 (thanks Howard!), located a better apiary site at Bells Hill Allotments in High Barnet, and collected a replacement colony of pure Buckfasts from

Peter Little of Exmoor Bees near Minehead, Somerset. These have been happily developing since then into a very strong and prolific colony, producing 125 lbs (57 kilos) of surplus comb and honey last year. Throughout last year, I expected them to swarm, but they resolutely refused to do so, so I am expecting them to do so this year! They are now bursting at the seams in a national brood box and two supers (so "Brood and Two Halves"!), and I have already added a super to give them storage space. I'm looking forward to another exciting year!

The 'Closed Season'

Throughout my short time as a beekeeper, I have learnt more and more about the fun and intricacies of looking after these fascinating creatures, and marvelling, in particular, at how they seem to be such intelligent beings, with language and communication skills unique to them. It is humbling to see what fools we humans sometimes are, compared to them! Since November last year, my girls have been busy doing their thing without much interruption from me, so I have spent the winter attending some fascinating educational meetings, shows, lectures and seminars which have all extended my knowledge even further (or have reminded me how much I learnt, but have already forgotten!).

LBKA's Own Monthly Meetings

Firstly, LBKA's wonderful monthly meetings (usually held on the [second Sunday of the month](#)), usually organised and led by Howard and Richard (thanks guys), have included honey tasting, moving colonies, how to treat for varroa, the fun Christmas Quiz (thanks Jon!), which I nicked and adapted to present to Barnet BKA's Christmas Party a few days later! This year, we have had sessions on honey treatments, pollen examination and swarm prevention/control – quite a programme.

Other 'Bee Days'

I have also attended a Surrey Federation 'Bee Day' in early February. This covered electronic monitoring of hives, 'botany for bees' (almost, but not quite rivalling Mark Paterson's botanical expertise!), the role of bumblebees in pollinating strawberries, honey branding/labelling, and a wonderful description of bees' dance language by Dr Fabio Manfredini of Royal Holloway College – worth hearing again!

There were two Middlesex BKA Federation 'days'. The first, before their AGM in February, had three impressive speakers. Dr Martin Bencsik, a researcher at Nottingham University who provides the 'bee sounds' for the Hive Project at Kew Gardens. His talk on Magnetic Resonance Imaging, in which he demonstrated the changes of vibration in a beehive when it is approaching swarm mode, gave a(nother!) new insight into the

world of the honeybee! He was followed by Clive de Bruyn, author of 'Practical Beekeeping' – a very useful beginners book – and now a bee farmer, breeder and NDB based in Essex – who described the 'spring jobs' in the apiary in an entertaining and approachable way – again, worth hearing again! The third speaker was Bob Smith from Kent, who (apart from passing me in the Basic in 2015 with a credit – thanks Bob!) is another NDB, who has recently got 'hooked' on pollen identification and gave a fascinating talk on that.

My final 'day' (again with Middx Fed) was a 'queen rearing day', when Ged Marshall, a Commercial Beekeeper based in Buckinghamshire talked about his 3-400 colonies and his queen-rearing project in that area, where he breeds both queens and (selected but unrelated) drones, with which he "floods the local drone congregation areas to ensure the best possible mating prospects for his queens"! We were shown (by Ged) how to graft eggs into plastic queen cell cups, how Apideas (small queen rearing boxes) operate, and how to mark and clip queens – altogether a fascinating day!

... and the Shows!

Apart from these outings, I have also attended both the London and National Honey Shows last autumn, and Bee Tradex at Stoneleigh last month. I felt that particularly Tradex was disappointing this year, because the traders seem now to be less interested in showing you the range of what is available to us beek geeks, but are more interested in just piling high and selling! I have decided that, next winter, given the benefits I have gained from attending the lectures I have described above, I will plan ahead and book some of the lectures at the Honey Show and the Spring Convention.

So... now to the next Season!

I'm all ready to go now for the weekly inspections of my hive for this year, and (I hope) ready for the swarm, when it comes – but this winter's activities have been almost as exciting as what is to come!

Facebook (In)digest(ion)

Some of the highlights from LBKA's [public facing Facebook page](#).

*Eugene Fahy
LBKA Member*

Postings on the Facebook page confirmed that the last

month has seen the start of start of activity in the hives. By 10 March, Richard Glassborow had found 9 frames of capped honey in one of his colonies while others were decidedly light. Geordy Mark suggested the bees may have just moved it up from the brood box to make way for laying. At the first inspection at the teaching apiary in Eden, all colonies had made it through the winter. There was plenty of pollen and nectar coming in but two colonies were light so they were fed with syrup in case the weather turns bad again. By the end of the month, Richard reported that most colonies inspected seemed further advanced than usual so we need to start thinking about our plans for swarm control.

There was a variety of research and education related postings. Norman Carreck publicised a [research paper](#) on varroa in the Journal of Apicultural Research which describes using a combination of sugar shake for monitoring and four successive trickle applications of oxalic acid. In warm, temperate, winter conditions there was a cumulative efficacy of 98%. The authors conclude that under certain conditions this method may provide adequate varroa control.

Karen Alton had a number of posts. She shared some [LASI research](#) which found that most ornamental plants on sale in garden centres are unattractive to pollinators. Geordy Mark replied that LBKA planting projects rely on evidence-based research rather than selecting from RHS lists. Karen also posted a link to [Francis Ratnieks' blog on the spring inspection](#) – checking honey stores and queen status. Lastly, she shared links to dates for the [LASI Integrated Varroa Workshops](#) in September and June dates for [Breeding and Using Hygienic Bees workshops](#).

There were a number of requests for advice on the page this month. [Angela Woods](#) asked about some comb honey which appeared to have fermented within six weeks – despite having a best by date of July 2018. It sparked an informative discussion about the correct packaging and storage of comb honey. Geoff Hood and Geordy Mark shared information gained on the General Husbandry course; comb honey should be allowed to drain on a drying rack for 24 hours before packaging. Under the Honey Regs 2015, packs with leaked honey pooled at the bottom are not legally fit for sale. Honey is hygroscopic and draws in moisture and comb sitting in a pool of liquid honey in a container which is not airtight, will spoil.

Neil Parker, who used to keep bees in Canada asked if he could keep bees on a shared rooftop terrace in central London. Replies from Angela Woods, Jonathan Lingham, Corrine Edwards, Martin Hudson and others confirmed that in principle you can keep bees anywhere in the UK. However, it is good practice to have basic training and insurance. Apart from potential nuisance issues, there may be restrictions on what is allowed in shared areas of a building so consent from the freeholder may be required. [Geordy Mark](#) and [Karin Alton](#) both shared links to their respective articles on rooftop beekeeping.

For anyone interested in using honey as an ingredient, Richard Glassborow highlighted an episode of [Hearty & Wholesome](#) on BBC2. It showed Mary Berry visiting an apiary to learn about beekeeping and collecting honey to make a pudding. It is [available](#) on the BBC iPlayer.

[Geordy Mark](#) posted a picture of an impressive 'bee hotel' in a tree behind Angel tube station

In what may well be the first of many, Angela Woods reported another sighting of the [Asian Hornet](#). This one was at a retail warehouse in Scotland.

Finally, April saw the annual [BBKA Spring Convention](#) which took place again at Harper Adams University in Shropshire.

Adventures in Beeland: Middlesex Federation Day

Another guest post from Emily's excellent blog – <http://adventuresinbeeland.com/>.

*Emily Scott
LBKA member*

On Saturday I went to the Federation of Middlesex Beekeepers' Associations annual 'Federation Day'. Each year the Middlesex associations (Barnet, Ealing, Enfield, Harrow, North London, Pinner & Ruislip) take it in turn to host a day of beekeeping talks; this year it was Ealing's turn, which was nice as last year it took me nearly three hours to reach Enfield!

Unfortunately I could only stay for the first speaker, Dr Martin Bencsik. Martin is a Reader in Physics at Nottingham Trent University – we were lucky as he had travelled down from Nottingham to speak for us. His research focuses on novel applications of Magnetic Resonance Imaging (MRI) and more recently on bioacoustics, including honey bee colony condition monitoring. His use of accelerometers to measure vibrations in honey bee hives led him to become involved in The Hive artwork at Kew, supplying the measurement technology and software which animates the work.

Martin began by explaining that accelerometers are used to sense vibrations. People often confuse sounds and vibrations. For honey bees and most insects, sounds are actually probably irrelevant. Perhaps 70% of insects prefer vibrations to sounds for communicating (crickets are an exception). Like a mobile phone, small



Dr Martin Bencsik

insects find it easier to produce efficient vibrations than sounds.

For his research he set up an apiary in France with an accelerometer in each hive. It takes a few seconds to implant each accelerometer in the comb, but it's expensive – at £500 per accelerometer. He sent an accelerometer round the audience for us to look at, which he emphasised he definitely wanted back! The technology has revealed some fascinating insights, particularly around swarming. The accelerometer picks up the sound of the swarm preparing to leave as the bees become so excited their vibrations shake the comb. Martin played us an amazing recording of a primary swarm from 20 minutes beforehand up to the moment of departure (condensed into a shorter clip, not the full 20 minutes). The buzzing filled the room as if we were inside the hive – it was quite intense and everyone clapped after it finished.

Martin mentioned that he has recorded the old queen piping before she swarms. This has happened twice in thirty primary swarms he's recorded, so is fairly rare but shows it's not just virgin queens that pipe. The time of day of the primary swarm has always been between 11am-3pm, but usually nearer 11 than 3.

Some swarm definitions:

- Primary swarm: the first swarm to leave the parent colony, usually with the old queen.
- Secondary swarm: a smaller swarm after the primary swarm has left, containing one or more virgin queens. Also called an 'afterswarm' or 'cast' swarm.

As well as putting the accelerometers in the comb, Martin has tried putting them in the brood box walls. However, the wood has different resonances that affects measurement, whereas comb is very stable and soft, so measurements from accelerometers in comb are more reliable. External sounds like planes, wildlife, birds etc can also affect the accelerometers placed in the brood box walls and drown out the vibrations of the bees. It is commercially appealing to put accelerometers in brood boxes though, as they might sell well.

He went on to tell us a little about how Wolfgang But-



'The Hive' at Kew



Federation cake table

ress produced The Hive installation – see my post 'The Hive at Kew' for more about this. I was impressed to hear that every cell in its lattice is different and each layer has been cut slightly differently, to a budget of £8m. Kew are now hoping to keep the installation until 2020, as visitor numbers are up since they hired it.

In response to a question on his future research, Martin revealed that he hopes to secure further funding for his work on honey bee monitoring. He feels passionate about directing his work towards helping bees and the environment, as he has become tired of the selfish actions of humans and the effect we have on the natural world. Ingenious and clever though humans are, so often we destroy all that is beautiful.

I hope everyone enjoyed the Federation day. I know a lot of hard work went into it by people such as Clare, Elsa, Sue, Jonesy, Andy, Tom and many others. The cake table was very popular!

Members' marketplace

This section is for members offering beekeeping items or services to members or requesting items. Items could include nucs, wax and honey. Email services@lbka.org.uk to add something here.

Lotte Vater: I'm moving back to Germany in a couple of weeks and therefore have to sell my bees. I have brought them last year as a nucleus and they have since grown to a strong and healthy colony. I'm ideally looking to sell them including the dadant poly-hive, 2 supers, wooden frames with foundation, queen excluder and entrance block. For the whole package I'm asking for £400, but I'm open for negotiations, if only the bees are required. I'm based in London E5. Please email Lotte91vater@web.de if you're interested.

Carole Wright. Can I ask that people let me know if they're doing a split of a large overwintered colony so I can buy their Nuc. Give me a call on 07885 221964 if you can help.

Philippe Sigal. I'm relocating to Lisbon in July and it is unlikely that I will have access to a garden or space where I could keep bees. As a result, I am selling the following items. Give me a call on 0776 6070 688 if you're interested. I'm in SW15.

- MidiMel: 4 frame tangential manual s/s extractor (Thorne product code = E1981) + 40kg Tank fitted with Valve (Thorne product code = T0003) Both bought a few months ago from Thorne and in mint condition (used twice). Price: £200 (negotiable).
- 2 × National Hive Complete with sloping hive stand, Happykeeper floor, Brood Box with 11 DN4 frames, Stainless Steel Wire framed Queen Excluder, 3 Supers each with 10 SN1 frames with castellated spacers and wired foundation, Crownboard with 2 plastic porter bee escapes, 4" roof (Thorne product code = N9991OM), Quick feeder, Hive tool, Smoker, 2 bee suits, 1 strong colony with a queen from last year, Bought and assembled 3 years ago. Price£600 (negotiable).

Emily Abbott. I've got loads of 30lb buckets that I need to shift! Happy to donate them to anyone who could use them. They're all buckets that I bought for honey, so they're food grade, I've given them a quick rinse, and have got writing on them so I'm definitely recycling them, rather than offering brand new buckets! emilyabbott@virginmedia.com.

Mark Patterson: I'm running a rooftop beekeeping course on Saturday 20th May from my Putney apiary. Full details and booking are on my website:

<http://www.apicultural.co.uk/courses>. Contact Mark on geordymark@hotmail.com.

Upcoming events

Sunday 14th May: Monthly meeting: Bee health day

10:00-13:00 and 14:00-17:00 at Walworth Garden (206 Manor Pl, Braganza St, SE17 3BN)

Our special Bee Health Day will see Mark, Howard and Richard talking about recognising and mitigating against bee diseases. It will include inspection of a hive and inspection of other comb. Due to the hands-on nature of the day, we require people to [register in advance](#). We will run the same session in the morning and the afternoon and are limiting numbers to 20 per session, prioritising those who have bees. Members-only please.

Committee

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with a member of the committee if you have any questions, requests, suggestions. We are:

- **Chair:** Richard Glassborow, chair@lbka.org.uk
- **Treasurer:** David Hankins, treasurer@lbka.org.uk
- **Secretary:** Natalie Cotton, admin@lbka.org.uk
- **Education:** Howard Nichols education@lbka.org.uk
- **Membership:** Aidan Slingsby, services@lbka.org.uk
- **Forage:** Mark Patterson, forage@lbka.org.uk
- **Events:** Emily Abbott, events@lbka.org.uk
- **Resources:** Tristram Sutton, resources@lbka.org.uk
- **Apiaries:** Vlad Zamfir, apiaries@lbka.org.uk
- **Emma:** Emma Nye, emma.nye@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Elliot Hodges, mentoring@lbka.org.uk

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

