



# The London Beekeepers' Association

# LBKA News

## November, 2021

Welcome to this month's newsletter! As the beekeeping year draws to a close, it's time to decide what to do with this new-found time on our hands (in theory). LBKA has some ideas, with our Winter Lectures in full swing, a Christmas Quiz (hopefully in person), reading and preparation for BBKA module exams (p5) and an incredible microscopy course (p7 with only limited places).

Thanks to those who have contributed to the newsletter this month. Janet and Lucie are new contributors who've summarised 'the best of' Bee Banter (p14) and a fascinating look at a colony that's been looking after itself (as bees can) combined with an opportunity to take them on. Wilf has also written about chunk honey (p11), and Howard about our education offerings (p5 and p7). This is in addition to regular contributions from Richard (p1), Howard (p13) and Mark (p13). Thanks also to Martin for proofreading.

We make the usual plea to consider helping us out, either by serving on the committee or simply contacting us to tell us how you would like to help.

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Happy beekeeping.

Aidan Slingsby, Editor, [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk)

## From our Chair

*Richard Glassborow*  
[chair@lbka.org.uk](mailto:chair@lbka.org.uk)

We don't keep a quantified record of enquiries about keeping bees in London, we probably should. But, evidence aside, my antenna are telling me that enquiries are on the rise again and if so, that will almost certainly translate into a surge in the number of colonies in London just at a time we are trying to flatten the curve.

The public's discovery of the natural world (a good thing) during lockdown probably has something to do with this but our old enemy, "Beewash" is still alive and well. We are now starting to proactively challenge the narrative and deflect it into a more evidence-based understanding of the London Bee Situation. The hope is that a better informed public, as well as better informed existing and wannabe beekeepers, both hobbyists and commercial, will in time lead to a self-regulated reduction in numbers of bees. That maybe unrealistic but it's worth a try and that's what we are trying.

At the same time we are now in a much better place to react to purveyors of beewash. Current examples include a Children's TV programme on BBC iPlayer, "Show me the Honey" and an article in the Financial Times, FT Weekend October 23rd, The Buzz Around



**Spotted by Geoff:** "A lovely sight as I went to get in my car: a Red Admiral sunning itself" Photo and quote: Geoff Hood.

Town, promoting a new beehive that allows its owners to keep bees in their living room (as a pet) and draw off honey when they feel like it. I am not even going to comment on that idea!

But the article contained classic beewash misinformation, "honey bees are responsible for pollinating 80% of our food crops", and that old favourite, "honey bees are in decline". That neither of these statements are true may seem a minor pedantic transgression but these errors matter very much as they occur frequently under the "Save the Bees" narrative and are responsible for misleading a great many people into well-intended but inappropriate actions which can have seriously negative consequences.

I know many of our members are already familiar with this kind of misinformation but I would share my response with you here so we are all kept in the loop.

To the FT editor: firstly: it is very important to know that not every bee is a honey bee. There are in fact 20,000 different species of bee globally. In the UK there are about 275, one of which is the honey bee, 24 are bumblebees and the rest are solitary. All of them are important. It is bees collectively, along with many other pollinating insects, that are responsible for the pollination of so much of our food crops. Yes, globally, many bees are in decline (40% of insects are in decline globally, a third are endangered). That really is scary as insects make the world go round. (Read "Silent Earth" by Dave Goulson).

But honey bees are NOT in decline. The reason why this is so important to know is because the misinformed version leads to disproportionate preference for honey bees and imbalances in ecosystems which can be harmful to biodiversity. In London there has been an unprecedented and ongoing rise in the number of honey bee colonies, more than doubling over the last ten years to over 5,000 registered colonies today. And this at a time of significant habitat loss in many areas of the city. Much of this is done in the name of helping bees but 'Bees and Flowers go Together': they have coevolved for over 100 million years. The situation in London does not help honey bees and it certainly does not help the more than 100 wild species with which they compete for nectar resources.

The London Beekeepers' Association are trying to address this. We have written a report, The London Bee Situation, gathering together existing data. A report by Professor Phil Stevenson, Kew Science, State of the World's Urban Ecosystems, drew on our report. His further research showed beekeeping in some parts of London to be unsustainable.

This is not a comfortable situation for a Beekeeping Association to be in. But doing nothing is not a responsible option. Neither is giving up beekeeping because, in the grand scheme of things, that would not change the situation.

We all need to find a less harmful interaction with the natural world. That is self-interest: we are part of it.

As an addendum to this: we have now received a request from the manufacturers of the "hive" to supply a professional beekeeper to deliver 4 hours beekeeping training to a customer in London.

It is very tempting to be critical and judgemental but these are the kind of individuals and businesses we need to better inform.

So we have said we may be able to help but that their proposal, as it stands, would be inappropriate in London. And we have sent them a lot of information.

If any of our members hear of similar inappropriate projects, by all means let us know so we can help them see what's going on. Or just point them to our web page on the London bee situation.

Stay well.

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## Announcements

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

### October's online Monthly Meeting and Pub Social

Howard and Geoff will lead November's Monthly Meeting on **Sunday 14th November** at 11:10 (slightly later than usual as it's Remembrance Sunday), with Howard on **preparing bees for winter** and Geoff on Oxalic Acid treatment. Followed as usual by Q&A and chat. The meeting will be at the usual Zoom link (in the [Members' Area](#) and in your email).

The **Pub Social** will be on **Tuesday 30th November** from 18:30. It might even be in a physical pub this month! Details to follow.

December's Monthly Meeting will be the Christmas Quiz. There's currently a bit of uncertainty about when and where it will be. It will either be on Saturday 11th or Sunday 12th December. We're hoping to have it as an in-person event with the option to join online. More details soon.

### AGM and new committee

We had the AGM on 10th November and (maximum) attendance was 27 people.

During the formalities, last year's AGM minutes were ratified, Richard presented key aspects of the Trustees' report, David presented and took questions on the accounts, and the new committee was confirmed, with



Produced by Lucy Cornwall, Chaf Bony (NNSS), Gay Morris, Mike Brown (National Bee Unit) with assistance from Corinne O'Hagan (National Biodiversity Data Centre Ireland), Stuart Roberts (BBSNHS)

www.nonnativespecies.org

Alert!

Report sightings of this species to: [alernonnative@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:alernonnative@ceh.ac.uk)

## Asian Hornet

**Species Description**

**Scientific name:** *Vespa velutina*  
**AKA:** Yellow-legged Hornet  
**Native to:** Asia  
**Habitat:** Nests usually high in trees and man made structures, sometimes closer to the ground; hunts honey bees, other insects and also feeds on fruit and flowers.

Not easily confused with any other species. Dark brown or black, velvety body. Characteristically dark abdomen and yellow tipped legs. Smaller than the native European Hornet.

Introduced to France in 2004 where it has spread rapidly. In 2016 the first UK sighting was confirmed in Gloucestershire. High possibility of introduction through, for example, soil associated with imported plants, cut flowers, fruit, garden items (furniture, plant pots), freight containers, or even untreated timber. The possibility that it could fly across the Channel has not been ruled out.

A highly aggressive predator of native insects. Poses a significant threat to honey bees and other pollinators.

Do not disturb an active nest. Members of the public who suspect they have found an Asian Hornet should send a photo to [alernonnative@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:alernonnative@ceh.ac.uk).



### Key ID Features

**Asian Hornet Queen**

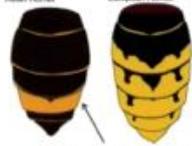
Queens up to 30mm, workers up to 25mm long

Distinctly dark brown or black velvety body with a few yellow bands

Legs brown with characteristic yellow ends

Photos from: J. Haseine, Rachel Scopes and Nigel Jones, Richard Bell

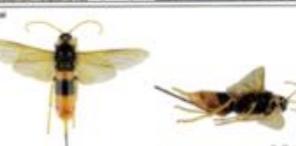
**Asian Hornet** vs **European Hornet**



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

Asian Hornet 'swarming' for honey bee prep

### Similar Species

<p><b>Asian hornet (<i>Vespa velutina</i>) for comparison</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Queen up to 30mm long, worker up to 25mm long</li> <li>Legs yellow at the ends</li> <li>Dark brown / black abdomen with a yellow / orange band on 4th segment</li> <li>Head dark from above, orange from front</li> <li>Dark coloured antennae</li> <li>Entirely black velvety thorax</li> <li>Never active at night</li> </ul>	<p>Actual size</p>  <p>© Raine</p>
<p><b>European hornet (<i>Vespa crabro</i>)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Queen up to 30mm long, worker up to 30mm long</li> <li>Legs brown at the ends</li> <li>Yellow abdomen marked with brown on the upper part, not banded</li> <li>Head yellow from above, yellow from front</li> <li>Yellow antennae</li> <li>Thorax black with extensive brown markings</li> <li>May be active at night</li> </ul>	<p>Actual size</p>  <p>Roger Burgeat</p>
<p><b>Giant woodwasp (<i>Dacnusa gigas</i>)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Larger than Asian hornet, female up to 45mm long</li> <li>Legs yellow</li> <li>Distinctive yellow and black banded abdomen</li> <li>Long cylindrical body unlike Asian hornet which has an obvious waist</li> <li>Long yellow antennae</li> <li>Female has an obvious long sting-like appendage (ovipositor) which it uses to lay eggs in trees</li> </ul>	<p>Actual size</p>  <p>© Raine</p>
<p><b>Hornet mimic hoverfly (<i>Volucella zonaria</i>)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Abdomen has more yellow stripes than Asian hornet</li> <li>Legs darker than Asian hornets</li> <li>Only one pair of wings (hornets and wasps have two pairs)</li> <li>Large, globular eyes</li> </ul>	<p>Actual size</p>  <p>Daniel Deacon</p>
<p><b>Median wasp (<i>Dolichovespula media</i>)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>More extensive yellow and orange colouration on abdominal segments than Asian hornet</li> <li>Yellow markings on thorax unlike Asian hornet</li> </ul>	<p>Actual size</p>  <p>© Raine</p>

### Field Signs

Active April-November (peak August/September). Mated queens over winter singly or in groups, in various natural and man-made hollows – underneath tree bark in cavities left by beetle larvae, in soil, on ceramic plant pots – potentially any small, well-insulated refuge. Makes very large nests in tall trees in urban and rural areas, but avoids pure stands of conifers. Will use man-made structures (garages, sheds etc.) as nesting sites.



For more information visit:  
[www.nonnativespecies.org](http://www.nonnativespecies.org)  
[www.nationalbeehiveunit.com](http://www.nationalbeehiveunit.com)

Alert!

Report sightings of this species to:  
[alernonnative@ceh.ac.uk](mailto:alernonnative@ceh.ac.uk)

Richard Glassborow as Chair, David Hankins as Treasurer, Simon Saville as Secretary, and Will Fry, Elliot Hodges, Stuart Kennon, Annie McGeoch, Howard Nichols, Aidan Slingsby and Tristram Sutton forming the rest of the committee.

In other discussion:

- **In-person activities.** Richard indicated the intention to re-start face-to-face Monthly Meetings (at Holland Park) and the Pub Socials. Those present generally supported a move towards face-to-face meetings.
- **London Bee Situation** There was discussion about the London Bee Situation and actions by some boroughs and companies. Richard indicated that the London Bee Situation would increasingly be the starting point for everything we do as LBKA. Those present supported the approach taken by the Trustees in promoting the issues related to honey bees in London.
- **Apiaries** Richard highlighted the success of the apiary at Holland Park, and praised the team that manages the apiary. This is a model that LBKA will seek to promote further, where a group of people collectively manage a small number of hives, rather than each managing a separate apiary.
- **Apiary data** There was a discussion about the reliability of Beebase's definition of "number of apiary sites" and the need for good quality data on honey bee colony density.
- **School Food Matters** LBKA plans to run a School Food Matters programme in 2022. This has proved to be an extremely effective means of reaching out to large numbers of families across London. It was also the largest source of income for the charity in 2021. Members present were strongly in support of this and offered to help.

### LBKA's educational offerings

Although you might think that exams aren't for you, we usually learn lots of useful things that we wouldn't ordinarily learn by preparing for exams. As a members' benefit, we will help you prepare for BBKA modules and we recommend everyone consider taking them, whatever your level. See more information in Howard's piece on page 5.

We also have the unique, fascinating and hugely popular microscopy course. Sign up quickly if you'd like to do it! Details on page 7.

### LBKA's Pollinator Fund

In a small way, LBKA is helping improve the forage situation for pollinators through its grant scheme. It's been another difficult year for planning and delivering forage projects in London, so it's not surprising that we've managed to support so few projects to fruition in recent months. However, we hope that conditions are improving and enabling organisations to start planning for next spring. So we think this is the right time to

Asian Hornet Identification leaflet. Source: [BBKA website](http://BBKA website).

remind members of the Pollinator Fund, and encourage applications for the coming growing season.

Since first advertised in January 2020, LBKA has committed funds totalling over £2,500 to St Paul's Community Centre, The Friends of Hillside Gardens and Palace Road Nature Gardens, St Mary's Secret Garden, and The Friends of Westcombe Woodlands. This is a good start, under the circumstances, but we want to do more.

The LBKA Pollinator Fund operates all year round, with grants of up to £1,000 available for full- or part- funded projects that have London pollinators at their hearts. Applications are sought from groups such as schools, allotment organisations, tenant & residents associations, horticultural societies, and other small charities. So if you are a member of such an organisation which is developing plans, or just has a "wish list" of projects that might align with LBKA's aims, please contact treasurer@lbka.org.uk for a Pollinator Fund guidance document and application form.

## Winter Lectures

The current season's Winter Lectures kicked off on Wednesday 3th November. A recording of that event can be accessed from the [Members' Area](#) of our website. Some of last winter's lectures are still available to view, as are some of the recent Monthly Meetings. We hope to add further content over coming months.

## Honey sales

If you have or want to list [your honey for sale on our webpage](#), please check and email [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) if you have amendments.

## Membership renewals

Our membership year ended last month and members will have had an **email telling them how to renew their membership**, if they wish. Note that renewals are **not** automatic, but it is **very easy** to renew. Thanks to the 89 members who've already renewed.

We hope that you wish to remain being part of LBKA. We rely on a large and active membership to enable us to do our work in helping promote better urban beekeeping, helping us influence policy, helping with our outreach and education work, and helping build a supportive beekeeping community. If you didn't get the email, please check your spam folder or email [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk).

## Dave Goulson: Silent Earth: Averting the insect apocalypse

This event is not organised by LBKA but Dave Goulson is an excellent speaker, we applaud his work in helping get these issues aired, and we recommend his book. [Tickets and more information are here.](#)

## Can you take part in a survey?

Samuel Perichon is a research associate at the University of Rennes (Brittany, France). As part of his research activities on bees ([here](#), [here](#) and [here](#)), he is conducting an independent survey of professional and amateur beekeepers in several European countries.

You can take part [here](#) and it will take about 15 minutes to complete.

## Old announcements from October

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

**Buy LBKA honey from our Mudchute apiary** Members are being offered previous years' honey from our Mudchute apiary at £5 per 8oz jar. Collection will be from the LBKA store in Big Yellow, 120 Stewarts Road, Battersea. Please let Tristram ([apiaries@lbka.org.uk](mailto:apiaries@lbka.org.uk)) have your order.

**London Bee Situation** LBKA's official position on the "London Bee Situation" is at <http://www.lbka.org.uk/london> with our report, other reference documents, and further reading. Do take a look and feel free to share with others.

**Do you have spare wax to donate to a school?** They are happy with unfiltered wax. Please email [elsowitsch@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:elsowitsch@yahoo.co.uk) if you can help.

## Old announcements from September

**Contribute to the Newsletter:** Please consider contributing meeting writeups, articles, photos, and/or recipes to the newsletter.

## Old announcements from August

**Congratulations:** Congratulations to members – Rachel Dewhurst (distinction), Karlis Briedis (credit), Kyle Moreland (pass), Luke Wyatt (credit), Katharina Bielenberg (pass), Rodney Phillip (credit), Sergio Ramos (credit), Anna Gaudion (credit), Annette Pearson (credit), Sue Irani (credit), Deborah Blythe (credit), Khevir Jettoo (distinction) and Andrew Hinton (credit) – who passed the Basic Assessment. Well done!

**Paid opportunities for members.** LBKA occasionally receives invitations or requests to undertake paid work such as apiary management, ecological/planting design/consultancy or educational consultancy. If you have the skills that may make you suitable and you would be interested in being considered to take on such work, please contact Simon Saville at [development@lbka.org.uk](mailto:development@lbka.org.uk). Once we've verified your skills, we'll start to push suitable opportunities your way when we get them. See more details in last few month's newsletters (link above).

**We need to help run our social media.** If you are good at communicating with social media, then we

need your help. Our social media channels already have an impressive reach, but we aren't using them very proactively to manage our communications. This is a good opportunity to help develop a profile of a local charity and its charitable objectives. Please contact Simon Saville at [development@lbka.org.uk](mailto:development@lbka.org.uk) to find out more.

### 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](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk).

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## November's Committee meeting

Here, we keep you up to date with what the committee discusses at our monthly committee meetings (and what keeps us awake at night). Let us know if you can help or have any suggestions that might help.

*Aidan Slingsby*  
[services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk)

As winter gets underway our planning for upcoming events is going well. David is making good progress with organising Winter Lectures with an exciting list of potential speakers. Elliot and Tristram are planning the Christmas quiz and exploring whether it can be in-person and whether it can be both in-person and online. We plan to run our beekeeping courses again. We plan monthly meetings to be in-person once again, but at Holland Park. We are saying goodbye to Fairley House School Hall.

The School Food Matters sessions have gone well and the organisers would like to meet LBKA members involved in its delivery.

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## Education Matters

Howard tells us about our educational offerings. We encourage all beekeepers to consider doing these.

*Howard Nichols*  
[education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk)

### 2022 BBKA Basic Assessment

Both the BBKA and London Beekeepers Association encourages members to take the BBKA Basic Assessment where possible. The BBKA requirement for entry

is that the applicant has been keeping bees for a minimum period of 1 year and is a BBKA member. The assessment is fairly straightforward and the syllabus can be downloaded free of charge from the BBKA website. Follow the dropdown menu for "Members" then "examinations and assessments". The cost is £20 and entry forms can also be downloaded at the same time.

Any LBKA member who has been keeping bees for a minimum of 12 months and wishes to take this assessment please confirm by email to [education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk). I will then be able to let you have some electronic course notes to read at your leisure over the winter months. Two members have already notified their interest. The BBKA website should be sufficient to deal with any queries regarding the assessment. Alternatively, ask another LBKA member who has taken it. Preparation for the Basic is an interesting way of continuing your beekeeping activities through the winter months. Even if you have been keeping bees for several years but not previously taken the assessment then please do seriously consider taking it in 2022. It is well worth the effort.

London Beekeepers Association will also run a revision course in Spring for members wishing to take the assessment. This is likely to last for 3 evenings (2 hours per evening) in early April. The assessment itself is both practical and simple oral questions. It lasts about 1 hour. We cover the theory on the revision nights and, for those wanting it, also offer a practical session at an apiary beforehand.

The assessment is not difficult, is within the capabilities of anyone who has been handling bees for 12 months and who is willing to download the syllabus and undertake some background reading. We also supply free course notes in electronic format.

### 2022 BBKA Modular examinations

These are written examinations, each on a different aspect of beekeeping, and will be held in March 2022. LBKA usually offers tuition to members wanting to take one of these examinations and will continue to do so this winter. The support offered depends upon the number of people who intend taking a particular module (there are 7 modules in total and I will offer tuition for 1 module, depending upon the interest). A lot of information is on the BBKA website. Anyone who is interested in developing their beekeeping knowledge by this route should first look at the BBKA website under the education section. There is a lot of information including A FAQ factsheet. Simply enter "module" in the search engine on the website. Then contact me by email on [education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk) to register your interest. I will then communicate directly with you. People who have taken the Basic in 2021 may be particularly interested in pursuing this.

Please note that a certain amount of commitment is required, both by me as tutor and the candidates. It



**Annie's washing.** Annie has washed all our bee suits. Here's just some of them. We also had some suits donated to us by **David Phillips** and would like to thank him for his generous donation. They will go to good use.

is not something that can be decided and pursued at the last minute. Those who may be interested should contact me now so that we can consider what options we all have.

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## LBKA Microscopy Course: Anatomy of the honey bee and pollen analysis

Be quick to sign up to this excellent and unique opportunity!

Howard Nichols  
[education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk)

LBKA proposes to run a detailed microscopy course for interested members during the winter months. This is the 7th time this will have been run by our association and is likely to be 3 × 2 hour evening sessions organised and led by Richard Glassborow and Howard Nichols. It will concentrate on the use of microscopes for members to learn about both the pollen grain structure and the internal anatomy of the honey bee. It will be mainly hands-on practical work and over the 3 weekly sessions we expect to deal with the following:

1. Simply theory of lenses, setting up of optical instruments and a summary of terminology used.
2. Investigation and analysis of pollen grains. How to prepare a slide. Use of negative and positive stains. Internal and external structure of a pollen grain and its features.
3. Embedding and dissection of the honey bee.

Item 3 is expected to form the major part of the course with 2 full sessions covering this subject. Embedding, dissection of head, thorax and abdomen will all be separately dealt with. Did you know that a mammal is pinned on its back for dissection but a bee needs to be pinned face downwards?

- All equipment will be supplied by LBKA
- Numbers must be limited to a maximum of 8 people due to availability of equipment and pupil / teacher ratio.
- There is no charge. It is part of your LBKA membership subscription.
- Date to be decided but will be 3 evenings at Walworth Garden Farm in January or February 2022.

Please note this course is open to all LBKA members. The only entry requirement is an interest (and being a member). Although specialised in form it is for anyone

interested or curious about these aspects of beekeeping. Microscopy and dissection are “niche subjects” and so equally accessible by both very new and longstanding beekeepers. It is not dependent upon length of beekeeping experience. Beekeepers in their first year enjoy this course just as much as older beekeepers. It is truly a fascinating sub-optical world and exploration is an adventure.

Due to the organisation involved we need to have an idea of those interested so that the sessions and content can be properly planned. Please register your interest by email to [education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk) as soon as possible. This does not require you to commit at this stage but attendees are dealt with on a strictly first come basis. In the past demand usually exceeds the 8 available places very quickly, sometimes within 72 hours of the newsletter being circulated.

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## Darwinian Beekeeping in NW3

Fascinating observations of bees that have been left to their own devices...and a chance to take them on.

*Lucie Chaumeton, with thanks to Geoff Hood  
 LBKA Members*

Somewhere between the HS2 excavations at Swiss Cottage and the busy Finchley Road, lies the quiet retreat of Adelaide Community Garden. Here, by the side of a small pond, a diverse bunch of friendly gardeners grow everything from Swiss chards and heritage raspberries, to rambling Asian gourds and multicoloured chillies. Its committee contacted LBKA for help with what they described as two hives, whose beekeeper had given them up “a while back”. But some bees were still flying in and out, so would someone come and see how things were going? The Bee Banter chat worked its usual magic and Geoff Hood and I volunteered to assess the situation.

### First inspection

We knew we were in trouble as soon as they sent us pictures – together with exceedingly grateful CAPITAL LETTERS and a lot of heart and bee emojis. There were indeed two stands, but no actual hives. Upon arrival we confirmed that one stand did have a floor (its mesh loose and not bee-proof, but we carried drawing pins), a 14× brood box with some unused frames and foundation (praise be!), a super and a roof. No bees there of course, because as all beekeepers know bees dislike brand-new boxes and clean foundation. On the other stand was a stack of rotted old equipment with bees literally flying out of two rot-holes in the side. How



*Adelaide Community Garden*

long again did you say since these were inspected? It turns out gardeners are just as bad as beekeepers: we asked two of them and got about four answers - none of them plausible.

It became clear as we prised, chiselled and heaved this stack of equipment apart, that it couldn't have been inspected for years. What followed was the sort of session where every implement in our exhaustive kit bags came into use. May it also serve as an object lesson in how to fail your Basic Certificate. Working from the top down, I still wonder how Geoff managed to prise the roof off the (open) crown board, stuck together as they were with brace comb. Then came three supers, positioned so their frames were at right angles from one box to the next. I know some beekeepers think that helps prevent brace comb but where I trained it was a no-no, and here was why: in order to prise them

apart Geoff and I had to use bricks as hammers to our hive-tool chisels, and throw in all our not inconsiderable combined weights.

Inside, a surprising amount of dark honey on the blackest comb I had ever seen in a super. I'm talking about the sort of colour you would apologise to the bee inspector for if they found it in your brood box, let alone somewhere you are producing food for human consumption. As with the super box we'd found on the next stand, it was clear the top one had last been extracted by simply cutting the comb off the frames, which had then been put back into the box without new foundation. Naturally, the bees had therefore used their full creativity in drawing new comb, weaving lovely diagonal lines across the frames. We eventually positioned this super under the brood for winter stores. And, as we found out after I had thoroughly messed up my ex-



*A close-up of the top flying hole – more propolis than wood here...*

tractor spinning the rest of the waxy frames, the next super had been built incorrectly, so frames could not sit flush to the top of the box. No wonder there was so much propolis around.

Amazingly, we did find a queen excluder under the three supers, and next came a BS brood box with a mix of BS and super frames inside, all with equally black comb dangling low into the next, empty super box (see pictures below).

We had by now set up a new rot-free home for the bees: a new spare stand found on site, with the floor we had found mended with drawing pins and the clean 14× box on top. One frame at a time, we shook the bees into this box, cut the bottom of each comb to size, and transferred them to the new box. With mostly black bees on black comb we had no luck in finding the black queen. And of course, we damaged the free comb on the two outside frames to prise it off the side of the box, but we did our best and then replaced these two outside frames with two of the 14× frames with new foundation found on site.

The board that formed the bottom of the stack was perhaps the most heart-rending sight of the inspection. It was a one-inch-thick board, rotted to a soft black consistency. On top was an upturned crown board with

evidence of prior settlement by solitary bees (see pictures below).

Despite all this, the colony was strong. Deformed Wing Virus indicated there was probably some varroa around, but the brood itself looked healthy and very plentiful for this time of year. Geoff has temporarily registered the colony under his name so it will get a full official health inspection in the Spring.

Next, out came the cleaning tools and blow torch so we could sterilise the crown board and queen excluder. Also handy were Geoff's spare correx and my roll of gaffer tape, so we could obstruct the crown board's feeding holes. Clean bin liners are always useful and, as it happened, I had just enough to wrap the two supers that might possibly be extracted. A third one would have been even better as, naturally, this non-apiary had neither a sealed bin nor a soda bucket. A metal bin with a non air-tight lid was procured instead. Another piece of correx and more pins made up for a missing entrance block. Geoff had brought a super box and a piece of insulation to add between the crown board and roof. Our work with the bees was finally done for the day.

All that remained was to make two piles of equipment, one for cleaning and one for burning, and head home in dismay at what we had found. Just about every basic



*Clockwise from top left: the top and bottom entrances to the stack, a typical comb, a never-washed beesuit, and solitary bee evidence on the bottom board.*

hygiene rule had clearly been disregarded for years: dirty leather gloves used over and over again, unwashed bee suits, no soda bucket, no bin, dirty equipment stored together with new in the shed. You won't be surprised that we found no trace of hive notes or veterinary medical records either. Clearly the bees now at ACG weren't even "their" bees, but a swarm that had settled into the box after it had sufficiently rotted down to provide access. Darwinian bees indeed. . .

We returned a week later with the honey extracted into a bucket and a couple of pounds of poor-quality wax rendered and ready donate to the primary school appeal. This time inspection was quick, and while Her Majesty remained elusive there were enough eggs and good brood around to show that we had indeed successfully moved her into her new Winter quarters. The

cleaning session, on the other hand, went on for hours. Finally, Geoff and I took an inventory of the equipment and drove home to write it all up.

### Could you be Adelaide Community Garden's next beekeeper?

Besides putting together this piece for (y)our amusement, we now had to report to ACG with recommendations for the future running of the hive. The gardening club is clearly very enthusiastic about keeping bees, and some of its members have tried to sign up to a training course, but it was evident to Geoff and I that it would be one or two seasons at least before any of them were able to take over unaided. We also referred ACG to LBKA's work on the London bee situation, to

highlight that other bee species need more urgent help than honeybees.

ACG also held some unrealistic expectations, believing that they had in the past received the colony's full honey harvest (I'm not so sure they had). Our report addressed this by highlighting to them the financial costs associated with keeping a colony properly, i.e. using two hives for swarm prevention, following basic beekeeping hygiene, and extracting and bottling honey in a manner compliant with UK law. As a result, ACG have now agreed to offer their site to a trained external beekeeper on the more usual basis, i.e. receiving a few jars of honey per hive by way of rent, with the beekeeper shouldering all expenses and efforts. ACG's existing colony being strong and, hopefully, having passed its health inspection in the Spring, any beekeeper taking it on should offer them some money towards it.

Could you be ACG's next beekeeper?

Geoff and I, unfortunately, live too far away to take over on an ongoing basis. But we have enjoyed working there and the site has many attractions for someone nearer its NW3 postcode. Parking is free by arrangement with one of the ACG members, there is space for at least three stands and, clearly, plenty of good forage – the honey I extracted was delicious! I really hope that someone will step up to keep bees at Adelaide Community Garden. Please get in touch with me ([miiddelucie@gmail.com](mailto:miiddelucie@gmail.com)) if you think it could be you.

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## Chunk Honey: An experiment this year

Wilf and his chunk honey.

*Wilfred Wood*  
LBKA Member

I could say that I planned to do this, but the reality is that due to a lack of planning, I needed a honey super urgently. Although I had plenty of frames I did not have any foundation. I also did not have time to get any foundation from my usual supplier, so just made up 12 frames without foundation and divided them up between four supers placing them between other frames that had foundation and or had been already drawn.

The results where quite good and produced just under 150 jars of Chunk Honey. Which I found did not have as much demand as anticipated, so I still have quite a lot left even though I have sold all of the rest of my honey this year.



*A frame of comb with capped honey*



*Chunks of cut comb in jars*

To answer the question of 'What is Chunk Honey' I produced the information below.

### By customer request

Some of my customers have asked to have jars of honey with the honey comb in the jar, this type of packaging is called Chunk Honey. There are several reasons for having a preference of having the honey this way, from not believing the honey is real, to preferring the taste of the wax, to wanting the additional pollens and other hive products contained in the beeswax.

Chunk Honey, or Honey Comb with Honey, is a premium product, here are the reasons why.

### Producing chunk honey

Producing chunk honey starts with a decision made in early spring, to produce honey comb that is suitable for chunk honey. Normally the boxes placed on the hive for the bees to fill with honey (called supers) are filled with frames that have a sheet of wax foundation, stamped with the familiar hexagonal pattern of cells that the bees draw out into comb, this they then fill with honey and cap. The wax foundation used in these frames has reinforcing wires embedded in it to give it enough strength to withstand the extraction process. Also, these frames are used for several years, with the cells that the bees produce preserved and reused by the bees so they do not need to produce as much wax themselves in subsequent years. Wax is excreted by the



*The finished product*

wax glands of the worker bee, a process that uses a lot of energy from the bee and consequently consumes a lot of honey, as honey is the energy source for the bees.

As people generally do not like eating wires, the standard wax foundation cannot be used, it is also quite thick, so a thinner foundation without any wires can be used instead. This foundation is not suitable for use in an extractor as the frame would fall apart so is reserved for either chunk honey, cut comb, or whole comb in its frame.

There is a further option, which is the option I have used, to not use any foundation and let the bees draw out a completely empty frame. This produces the purest honey comb as all the comb and contents are produced by the bees in the hive, and no wax from unknown sources has been introduced into it.

The effect of producing honey comb in this way will reduce the honey harvest, as more honey is used to produce the wax needed, hence this becomes a premium product.

## The process

Once the frames have been introduced into the hive the bees will produce wax and draw out the frames in whatever manner they like. As can be seen in the image, the comb is not regular, indicating that no foundation wax has been used.

When the frames have been drawn and filled with honey and capped, they are removed from the hive, the comb is cut from the frame and then further cut into chunks. Individual chunks are then placed into jars.

The jars are then topped up with honey, in this case with honey from the same hives in the same apiary.

# November in the Apiary

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

*Howard Nichols*  
[education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk)

The beekeeping season is now over until February or March. Even with the extended period of warm weather we have nowadays, November still remains an inactive month for the beekeeper. It is now too late for feeding as the bees will be unable to process the syrup. However, a certain amount still needs to be done.

**Tidy up.** Tidy up the apiary if not already done, with complete cleaning, sterilising and storing of equipment.

**Check wax moth.** Check stored supers for evidence of wax moth infestation. The lifecycle of the wax moth is substantially different to that of the honey bee. A wax moth egg is temperature dependent and so able to stay as an egg then hatch after a few weeks or months. Supers should be stored in a cold and draughty place if possible but also checked during winter. If any evidence of wax moth is found the best way to deal with it is to place the frame(s) in a deep freeze cabinet for 48 hours. This will kill the pest in all 4 lifecycle stages.

**Plan for further varroa treatment in December.** December is the usual month for treating the colony with Oxalic Acid. Monitoring natural mitedrop in November is a useful diagnostic tool and precursor to actual treatment next month. Insertion of the varroa floor for 1 week in November can give useful information to the beekeeper. If Autumn treatment with Api-guard or other such authorised product was successful then mite drop should be very low. If mite drop is high then the treatment has not been as successful as anticipated and the beekeeper should re-evaluate the Autumn methodology.

**Check hive is secured.** Check the hive is secure and that the roof cannot blow off or be dislodged. Placing of heavy items such as a couple of housebricks on the roof is usually sufficient for a National with a well fitting flat roof. They are designed not to blow off. A hive with a gabled roof, such as a WBC, or a nucleus hive may need tethering with rope.

**Read and learn.** For those who have not taken the BBKA Basic Assessment, please download the syllabus from the BBKA website and consider background reading with a view to taking the assessment next summer. The requirement is that you have kept bees for a minimum period of 1 year. It is now a BBKA requirement that you are also a member of the BBKA. LBKA ac-

tively encourages and assists its members to take this assessment. In late November I will send electronic course notes to those LBKA members who wish to take the assessment next year. Reading about bees and beekeeping in the winter months is a useful way to spend our spare time and acts as a beekeeping bridge between the seasons. Subject to Covid restrictions, LBKA is also offering a microscopy course in January and a Module tuition course in February.

**Consider your approach to next season.** Will you need an additional hive, nuc box or replacement frames? Most equipment suppliers have winter sales where they sell slight seconds. This is an excellent time to buy, especially if you search 2 or 3 websites for offers. If 2 or 3 people jointly purchase then you may even be able to save on the delivery charge.

Finally, do stay in touch with your beekeeping association. We continue with our usual monthly meetings and are about to start with our mid-week winter lectures.

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## Last month's Monthly Meeting: Effects of pathogens on honey bees.

What happened at our meeting last month.

*We need volunteers willing to help write these sections. Please contact [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) if you may be able to help in some months.*

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## Focus on Forage

Mark tells us what's in flower at this time of year. This article was originally written in 2015.

*Mark Patterson*  
[forage@lbka.org.uk](mailto:forage@lbka.org.uk)

Only the most hardy of flowers are still in bloom in my garden as whilst the days have been mild, it is starting to become much colder at night. My **pumpkins**, **courgettes** and **nasturtiums** are already keeling over due to the cold nights, only my **cosmos** and **sunflowers** persist out of the garden annuals I have flowering. Quite a few of my herbaceous perennials are struggling on how-



ever with **Cat Mint**, **Helenium**, **Rudbeckia**, **Asters**, **Golden rod** and **Penstemon** still in bloom.

Away from my own garden I've spotted **Abelia**, **Choisya**, **Hebe (Autumn Joy)** and **Escalonia** pushing out a late flush of second blooms, though not in sufficient abundance to entice honey bees to visit.

The ivy flow is now coming to an end with most of the

blooms already fading and the signs of the first berries appearing. These will ripen in time for late winter and will provide a feast for overwintering thrushes and wood pigeons after the red berries of **hawthorn**, **cotoneaster** and **sorbus** have all been polished off.

I've been busy in the greenhouse this past week, cleaning the green house firstly to evict slugs and snails hiding in stacks of empty pots and cleaning algae and moss from the windows to ensure overwintering plants receive as much light as possible through the dimly lit winter. Having been cleaned I am now busy propagating cuttings from my favourite aromatic shrubs including **lavender**, **sage**, **rosemary** and cuttings from **flowering currant**, **Escalonia** and **Hebe**. I've also been cutting down fading stems from herbaceous plants and lifting and dividing them to propagate for next year. This week I've done this to **marjoram**, **mints**, **cat-mint** and next on my list are the **Heleniums**, **Asters** and **Kniphofia**.

My bulbs are now all in the ground including an additional 200 **Saffron Crocus**. The ones I planted last year are just beginning to flower offering pollen to the bees on warm days and soon **Saffron** for my kitchen!

Other tasks to be getting on with in the garden include collecting fallen leaves to make leaf mulch for the garden – this is great as a top dressing for suppressing weeds and feeding the plants.

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## Best of Bee Banter

Janet has waded through last month's Bee Banter, distilling the things that catch her eye.

*Janet Evans*  
LBKA member

I've paid particular attention to the LBKA Bee Banter WhatsApp group this month as I volunteered to produce a digest of content. Phew that was a tall ask! Just for info – that's 20 A4 pages of comments (without the photos), just in one month. I've had to pick and choose and focus on a few topics; rather than a digest, I'd say it is a summary or flavour of some of the posts in October, inevitably leaving out an enormous number of subjects. I've kept the posts anonymous, but in future I may attribute the post, with the contributor's permission of course.

### Feeding

At the beginning of the month feeding was on beekeepers' minds – and as one beekeeper had been unable to finish their feeding schedule by the end of September they asked about a safe temperature for liquid feed. This generated a variety of answers (the beekeeping

"ask a question and get 6 answers" syndrome), although all good answers I'm sure.

One experienced beekeeper advised that home produced 2:1 liquid feed will tend to ferment in winter, causing dysentery in bees, so it is not wise to use in November. But commercially produced inverted syrup "ambrosia" and fructose doesn't ferment and can be used through the winter. Other comments suggest that white sugar can be used, or sugar cubes or even a large dampened bag of sugar can be placed on top of the crown board. One contributor places a 12.5k block of fondant on top of the hive after feeding with Ambrosia syrup enriched with Hive Alive as "there is some evidence that thymol in the gut reduces nosema". The block lasted only three weeks! That's one hungry hive!

### Pests and diseases

One really useful aspect of Bee Banter is the large number of contributors; members often ask questions about hive treatment but others share videos and articles they have come across over a wide range of media. So links are a great resource, although can lead down deeper and deeper rabbit holes. This video discusses the transmission, via trophallaxis, of deformed wing virus ("DWV"). During the removal of varroa-infected pupae, bees cannibalise part of the bodies. This video shows the results of a scientific study on hygienic behaviour of bees; [it seems the bees' hygienic behaviour contributes to the spread of DWV directly between bees](#).

Mouse guards, to use or not to use, closing down entrances to reduce the chance of robbing by wasps, are also hot topics in the late summer/autumn. I recall from last year one experienced beekeeper was surprised by a family of mice in the roof of a hive, they did look quite cute and he decided to leave them alone as they were not harming the hive.

### Equipment and "new-fangled" hive designs

Equipment is a recurring theme and when questions were asked if anyone knew of a good off-the-shelf honey warmer a steady flow of helpful suggestions came in including spending large sums on Immersion Thermal Cookers, followed by great home-made alternatives like foldable warming boxes, in which case a photo of said item may have helped the uninitiated.

Links to current on-sale items are frequently posted.

A swarm of comments are inevitable when someone discovers an article on a new hive design, always offering to give the beekeeper an easy way to extract honey, observe or keep bees in their backyard or on a balcony with minimal effort. The latest was a weekend Financial Times article commencing "Could bees be the ultimate modern pet?" Described as a new design, "encased in transparent Perspex with a 2m Chimney entrance" and continuing with "Bees can travel up to 8km in search

of pollen, so sustenance shouldn't generally be a problem!"

This was bound to generate some teeth grinding from LBKA members concerned about spreading disease, general shortage of forage, "irresponsible" beekeeping etc. The design was given short shrift, with people posting explosions of "Just what the bees, honey and otherwise don't need . . . bees are not pets!" "How do you inspect it for swarming or notifiable disease?" "How do you stop the condensation and heat loss?" and "It's verging on animal cruelty" Although this scepticism comes quick and fast from beekeepers who have tried and tested hives over the years, and may appear dismissive of new ideas, comments can still be helpful for newer beekeepers. It's easy to be taken in by what looks like a quick way into beekeeping, or an attractive but expensive piece of equipment.

### Forage and environmental issues

Lack of forage in London is a hot topic every month and helpfully members of the LBKA committee frequently repost the link to the [London Bee Situation Paper](#) produced by LBKA, well worth a read or reread.

This month the topic of more natural beekeeping came up (often raised alongside the impact of beekeeping on other wildlife and disease management, intensive agriculture and the damage to the environment and its consequent contribution to climate change). This month one contributor describes experience of using Warré hives, another describes an apiary visit where the beekeeper is not a honey/bee farmer but has 8/9 hives managed in as natural a way as possible, in an organic garden. The bees are reported to "manage their own diseases and parasites."

Wanting to look inside the hive is something that maybe lots of beekeepers don't want to admit to. But for this contributor one reason for having their own national hive, rather than a design for more "natural" methods such as the Warré, is the ease of opening as much out of interest and curiosity as a desire to produce honey for human consumption. I like the honesty that often appears in LBKA Bee Banter! We all start beekeeping with an urge to see inside the box.

Comments on management of bees for reduction of varroa, honey production, swarm reduction, use of pesticides, climate change, organic methods of beekeeping, importing or not importing queens, queen breeding, and so much more! Often one topic creates other questions that often spin off from something that seems obvious to more experienced beekeepers. Only occasionally straying off bee related topics – it's an excellent resource and no question is too insignificant - it's great to be a group participant.

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## 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](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) to add something here.

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## Upcoming events

### Sunday 14th November: Monthly meeting: Winter preparations

*11:10-13:00 at same zoom link as usual (in the Members' Area of the website and sent to your email).*

Howard will cover preparing bees for winter and then Geoff will cover Oxalic Acid treatment. We will start at 11:10 as it's Remembrance Sunday.

### Tuesday 30th November: Pub Social

*from 18:30*

We might be in a physical pub this month! Details to follow.

### Wednesday, 1st December: Dave Goulson: Silent Earth: Averting the insect apocalypse

*19:00-22:00 at RHS Hilltop, RHS Wisley, Woking, GU23 6QB*

This event is not organised by LBKA but Dave Goulson is an excellent speaker, we applaud his work in helping get these issues aired, and we recommend his book. [Tickets and more information are here.](#)

### Saturday/Sunday 11/12th December: Monthly meeting: Christmas Quiz and Social

Elliot will be the quizmaster with contributions from Howard and others. It will either be on the Saturday or Sunday, and we hope to have it in-person with the option to join online. More details soon.

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## 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](mailto:chair@lbka.org.uk)
- **Treasurer:** David Hankins, [treasurer@lbka.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@lbka.org.uk)
- **Secretary:** Simon Saville, [admin@lbka.org.uk](mailto:admin@lbka.org.uk)
- **Education:** Howard Nichols [education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk)
- **Membership:** Aidan Slingsby, [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk)
- **Events:** Annie McGeoch, [events@lbka.org.uk](mailto:events@lbka.org.uk)
- **Apiaries:** Tristram Sutton, [apiaries@lbka.org.uk](mailto:apiaries@lbka.org.uk)
- **Mentoring:** Elliot Hodges, [mentor@lbka.org.uk](mailto:mentor@lbka.org.uk)
- **Resources:** Will Fry, [resources@lbka.org.uk](mailto:resources@lbka.org.uk)
- Stuart Kennon, [stuart.kennon@lbka.org.uk](mailto:stuart.kennon@lbka.org.uk)

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

