



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

January, 2022

Happy New Year!

The weather has turned more wintry, just in time for our Winter Lectures, the next of which will be on Saturday (8th January). Ulster Beekeepers (p4) also have an excellent programme of Winter Lectures. Our monthly meeting will be a chance to reacquaint ourselves with pests and diseases.

Thanks for Richard and Howard for their regular article contributions this month and thanks for all those who have help provide content. We've reprinted Mark's excellent advice on forage creation (p9). We want this newsletter to reflect our members, so please do add your perspective.

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Thank you to this month's contributors: **Lucie Chaumeton, Janet Evans, Richard Glassborow, Geoff Hood, Martin Hudson, Howard Nichols, Mark Patterson, Sara Ward and Stephen Wheelwright.** Would you like to join these esteemed contributors? If so, contact me.

Aidan Slingsby, Editor, services@lbka.org.uk

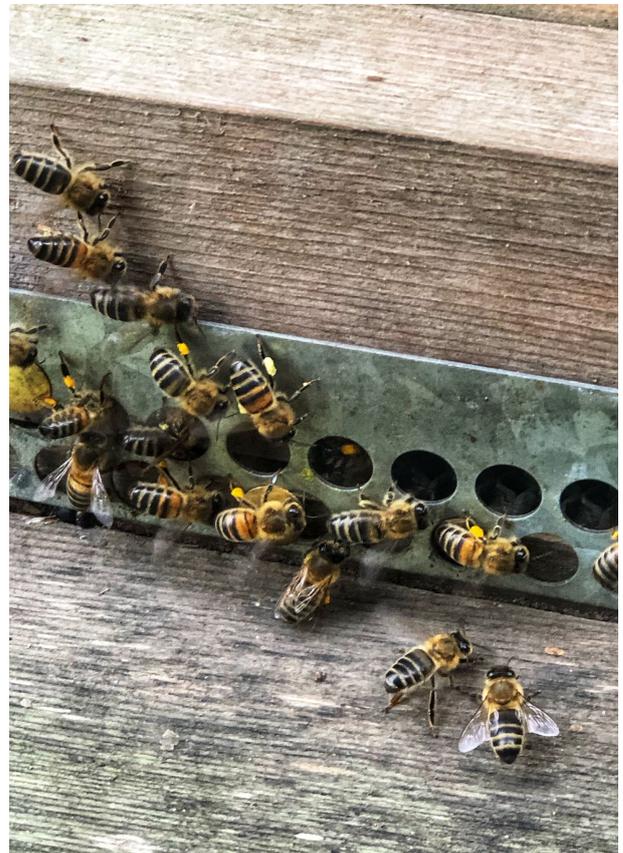
From our Chair

Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk

Happy New Year fellow members of the LBKA! May 2022 be...er...better than last year.

Quite how the year ahead will turn out will, to some extent, already have been determined by how well our bees were prepared, or helped to prepare themselves, at the end of last summer: principally with respect to low varroa levels contributing to healthy new bees with good life expectancy to carry them through winter and sufficient stores to keep them alive and fuel thermo-regulation.

But the outcome is not limited to what goes on in the box. The hive functions not in isolation but in a wider, dynamic environment. London's heat island effect micro-climate, combining with climate change and



Spotted by Sara: Planning a Pollen Party for New Year's Eve? Photo and caption: Sara Ward.

gardening trends, results in there being flowering plants pretty much year-round. This is not really a good or a bad thing, it just is how it is. It is not the model found in most beekeeping books so we all need to read the bees as well as the books. While there is almost always pollen somewhere, winter temperatures may not always be high enough for flowers to metabolise nectar production but not cold enough to keep the bees in a fuel-efficient cluster. Bees are flying most days throughout winter these days and that uses up their winter food supplies. This can be quite rapid if brood production has remained high through a mild autumn and the winter colony is large.

Large colonies also have more brood which, in turn, can mean more varroa. Assume nothing: check both supplies and varroa.

Food supply issues may also vary depending on whereabouts you keep bees. In central London, where forage is scarce and cold short days restrict the foraging range, colonies may be more exposed to nutrition issues. Even if they remain alive the stress may make them more susceptible to pathogens.

And, as if we do not find this sufficiently challenging, we are now asking questions about the big colonies are best paradigm because of the way they interact with wild bees and other pollinators and the overall numbers of honey bees in London. Nobody said responsible urban beekeeping was easy.

If anybody reading this is interested to find out more and is not already on the LBKA WhatsApp group, BeeBanter, I do recommend they give it a try. It is just the kind of topic that gets discussed at both theoretical and practical levels.

BeeBanter is also a good forum for feedback to the Trustees by both directly addressing the committee and indirectly revealing membership interests, concerns and needs which we can then try to respond to.

There are currently about 140 members in the group, which is about half the membership. By no means all are actively contributing but we consistently see evidence the group is highly valued by 'quiet' members as well as those more actively engaged. In addition to being a great knowledge exchange it has a social dimension too – a tangible sense of community.

It can get very busy but you don't have to read everything. If you are not already a member of BeeBanter, I do recommend you give it a try.

Finally, on the subject of feedback, I would like to thank the many members who provided feedback on the membership renewal form. The Trustees are committed to delivering benefits to bees, beekeepers and beekeeping in London – as set out in the charitable objects. We try to keep our membership informed on issues and opportunities relevant to your interests and it is vital that we stay in touch with members regarding the character and direction of the organisation. The feedback provided

at renewal this year was unanimously positive which is both a relief and encouragement. Thank you.

A number if you made practical suggestions, some of which were already in the pipeline (evaluation; social media; etc.). We won't always be able to act upon suggestions, partly for reasons of capacity (there's a lot going on) and partly because there is a need to maintain balance for a diverse membership. But please do not hesitate to forward any thoughts, criticism, wishes or needs you may have. Don't wait to be asked.

Now you had better get on with the frame building!

Stay well.

Announcements

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

January's online Monthly Meeting and Pub Social

Howard will lead January's Monthly Meeting on **Sunday 9th January** at 11:00 at the usual Zoom link (in the [Members' Area](#) and in your email). It will be a broad sweep summary of all the main **diseases and pests**. It is based upon Pests' part of the General Husbandry syllabus and the depth of discussion will depend upon the depth of questions asked by those attending.

The Pub Social this month will be on **Tuesday 25th January** from 18:30 at **Kings Arms** (25 Roupell St, London, SE1 8TB), a short walk from Waterloo Station (Northern Line).

February's Monthly Meeting will be delivered by guest speaker, **Bob Smith** from Medway Beekeepers, a former Bee Inspector and Basic assessor to the LBKA on the subject of "Varroa Control 2022: spoilt for choice". Now with 15 VMD-Approved varroacides, plus multiple application methods, this session will be about how to make good choices and stay safe!

Winter Lectures

We have the Winter Lecture "how modern beekeeping enhances nectar competition and contributes to species extinction of wild pollinators" on **Saturday (8th January) at 18:30 via Zoom**. Please **see your email for the details of how to join**. This is a repeat performance for Torben Schiffer, (National Honey Show 2021), from the Julius Maximilian University of Würzburg. It may be a contentious subject for us, but fits well with LBKA's exploration of The London Situation and desire to discover truly sustainable beekeeping models.



Produced by Lucy Cornwell, Olaf Booy (NNSS), Gay Marks, Mike Brown (National Bee Unit) with assistance from Colette O'Flynn (National Biodiversity Data Centre Ireland) Stuart Roberts (BWFARS)

www.nonnativespecies.org

Asian Hornet

Alert!

Report sightings of this species to: alernnonnative@ceh.ac.uk



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 in/on 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 alernnonnative@ceh.ac.uk.

Key ID Features

Asian Hornet Queen



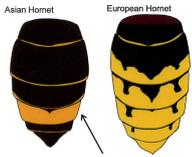
Queens up to 30 mm, workers up to 25 mm long

Entirely dark brown or black velvety body, bordered with a fine yellow band

Legs brown with characteristic yellow ends

Photos from: J. Haxaire, Rachel Scopes and Nigel Jones; Richard Ball

Asian Hornet **European Hornet**



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



Asian hornet 'hawking' for honey bee prey

Similar Species

Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*) for comparison Actual size

- Queen up to 30mm long, worker up to 25mm long
- Legs yellow at the ends
- Dark brown / black abdomen with a yellow / orange band on 4th segment
- Head dark from above, orange from front
- Dark coloured antennae
- Entirely black velvety thorax
- Never active at night




Q. Rome

European hornet (*Vespa crabro*) Actual size

- Queen up to 35mm long, worker up to 30mm long
- Legs brown at the ends
- Yellow abdomen marked with brown on the upper part, not banded
- Head yellow from above, yellow from front
- Yellow antennae
- Thorax black with extensive brown markings
- May be active at night




Roger Burgess, National Bee Unit

Giant woodwasp (*Urocerus gigas*) Actual size

- Larger than Asian hornet, female up to 45mm long
- Legs yellow
- Distinctive yellow and black banded abdomen
- Long cylindrical body unlike Asian hornet which has an obvious waist
- Long yellow antennae
- Female has an obvious long sting-like appendage (ovipositor) which it uses to lay eggs in trees




Q. Rome

Hornet mimic hoverfly (*Volucella zonaria*) Actual size

- Abdomen has more yellow stripes than Asian hornet
- Legs darker than Asian hornets
- Only one pair of wings (hornets and wasps have two pairs)
- Large, globular eyes




Didier Descouens, Alan Morgan

Median wasp (*Dolichovespula media*) Actual size

- More extensive yellow and orange colouration on abdominal segments than Asian hornet
- Yellow markings on thorax unlike Asian hornet




Q. Rome

Field Signs

Active April-November (peak August/September). Mated queens over winter singly or in groups, in various natural and man-made harbours – 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
www.nationalbeeunit.com

Alert!

Report sightings of this species to: alernnonnative@ceh.ac.uk

Here's a recap of subsequent upcoming Winter Lectures which will be all delivered via Zoom at 18:30.

Saturday 5th February: "Man-made breeding and selection versus natural reproduction and selection – why modern beekeeping will eventually send the species of honey bees into its demise". Another challenging lecture from Torben Schiffer, and a timely opportunity to discuss queen rearing, the pros & cons of imported queens, London mongrels and much more. We may not get all the answers, but we should come away with plenty to think about!

Wednesday 16th February: "Varroa-resistant Honeybees". This lecture will be delivered by Professor Stephen Martin from University of Salford, and will focus on the various tolerant mechanisms identified, and how some honey bee populations in Brazil and parts of Africa, USA and UK all appear to have evolved similar ways to combat the Varroa mite.

Wednesday 23rd March: "Swarming – oops my bees have swarmed". This is the second lecture this winter from Clare Densley & Martin Hahn from Buckfast Abbey. Hopefully it will be a timely reminder of what's just ahead of us, full of useful tips to help us identify the signs of swarm preparation and mitigate the risk of swarming, while working with the bees' natural instinct for colony reproduction. Surely our bees won't swarm before we hear this talk, will they...?

Wednesday 20th April: "Simple Queen Rearing". A final outing for the season from the team at Buckfast Abbey. They'll be describing easy ways to propagate lovely queens without the need to graft or invest in cup kit systems. Doubtless there'll be some admissions of failure too, and more anecdotal evidence that the bees don't always do what we want them to!

Please put those dates in your diaries, and look out for Zoom invitations by email closer to the time. See also those from Ulster Beekeepers (page 4).

Instagram

Since reviving the account at the end of last year, our number of followers has grown from to 326 to 343 +/-5% (almost in line with inflation). Please keep sending your bee related pictures to Lucie at instagram@lbka.org.uk or share them with your authorisation to publish on the Bee Banter WhatsApp group. And if you are on Insta do follow [@londonbeekeepersassociation](https://www.instagram.com/londonbeekeepersassociation).

LBKA Courses in 2022

In the light of Covid uncertainties, huge demand, and the desire not to overload us with more work, we decided that courses will be a mix of Zoom sessions for theory and practical sessions in LBKA apiaries for up to 60 people. The content of the course will be similar to previous years, with a stronger emphasis on the London Bee Situation. Sessions will be in April and May.

Asian Hornet Identification leaflet. Source: [BBKA website](http://www.bka.org.uk).

LBKA members will be the first to know when we open for booking!

LBKA's educational offerings

Please see information in Howard's piece on page 7.

Winter Lectures from the Ulster Beekeepers' Association

The Ulster Beekeepers' Association have a fantastic programme of Winter Lectures on the theme of "sustainable beekeeping". These are well-worth a look.

Wednesday 5th January, 8pm with Celia Davies. "So you want to be a confident beekeeper?" The steps that a potential beekeeper needs to follow to become confident around bees, and give them the competence to manage a colony of their own in a successful way. [Register here.](#)

Wednesday 12th January, 8pm with Randy Oliver: "Produce a good nuc and use it well". The nucleus hive is useful for so many bee hive manipulations throughout the year. Randy will cover how to produce good nucs and how to use them for such as increase, swarm control, varroa control etc. [Register here.](#)

Wednesday 19th January, 8pm with Professor Robert Paxton: "Bee viruses past, present & future: impact & management". Arguably the most serious threat to honey bees worldwide are viruses, some of which can also be found in other insect species. What is the evidence for spillover, what impact do they have and how can they be controlled? [Register here.](#)

Wednesday 26th January, 8pm with Professor Jamie Ellis: "The swarm - reproduction at colony level". Most people know about reproduction at the individual honey bee level: queens producing the bees in the nest. However, few consider that colonies also reproduce, a feat accomplished by the swarm. Jamie will discuss bee behaviour before and during swarms and place this within the larger context of a colony's biology. [Register here.](#)

Wednesday 2nd February, 8pm with Randy Oliver: "Queen rearing for the small producer". Every beekeeper wants to keep their queens young and vigorous for maximum colony health and production. There are many ways in which queens can be reared easily and well within the capability of the hobbyist beekeeper. Randy will outline some of these methods. [Register here.](#)

Wednesday 9th February, 8pm with Professor Dave Goulson: "Silent Earth". Insects are vital, fascinating, weird and wonderful. They are food, pollinators, recyclers, pest controllers, and much more, so we should be deeply concerned that they are in rapid decline. Dave will explain the many causes of insect



Oxalic acid sublimation using the electric Sublimox. Geoff used an eke and crownboard to treat his hives from the top rather than from the back of the floor. This is more efficient for hives overwintering over a super, whether full of stores or empty for insulation purposes. Photo: Geoff Hood.

decline, and then turn to the solutions of this crisis. [Register here.](#)

Wednesday 16th February, 8pm with Professor Jamie Ellis: "A year in the life of a honey bee colony". Honey bees live in perennial colonies. Survival and reproduction are the ultimate goals of any organism and honey bee colonies are no different. Jamie will discuss the yearly lifecycle of a colony and what it does to survive the fluctuations in temperature, rainfall, forage availability, and other stressors that it faces. [Register here.](#)

Old announcements from December

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

Old announcements from November

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

Old announcements from October

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,



Thanks to Lucie for her pictures of varroa treatment of the Adelaide community garden's hive last Thursday. Some bees were actually bringing pollen in, and quite a few mites dropped onto the tray despite the treatment taking less than a minute. Photo and caption: Lucie Chaumeton.



Feeding bees fondant. The bees are not clustered (as seen through the Perspex crown board). Photo: Geoff Hood.

Battersea. Please let Tristram (apiaries@lbka.org.uk) have your order.

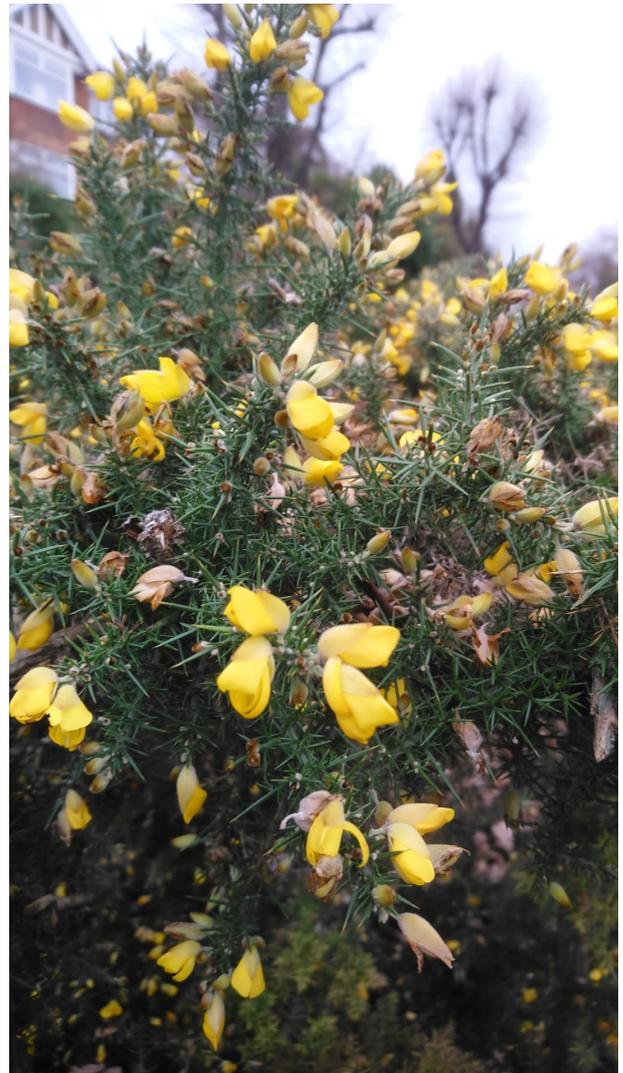
London Bee Situation LBKA's official position on the "London Bee Situation" is at <http://www.lbka.org.uk/london> with our report, other reference documents, and further reading. Do take a look and feel free to share with others.

Old announcements from September

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

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.



Spotted by Janet: At Alexandra Palace today. Still flowering. Photo and caption: Janet Evans.

December'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

This meeting had a deliberately "light" agenda, with discussion based mainly around a briefing document from Richard.

It was agreed that the focus for the year should be to "improve the smooth running of the machinery to deliver core member services" (as per Richard's paper), rather than being ambitious in trying to achieve lots more. It was also recognised that Covid limitations



Spotted by Stephen: *Very quick inspection on 27th December showed brood in all stages, including a section of capped brood. There was no brood or eggs at all on 28th November. This confirms that the best time to do an oxalic acid treatment this year was late November or three first week in December. Treating during the week between Christmas and New year's Day will not be as effective Photo and caption: Stephen Wheelwright.*

will persist, and that the future is inherently uncertain. Contingency planning and flexibility will be required.

We had hoped to be holding our monthly meetings and courses at Holland Park, but we are still waiting to finalise our agreement with them.

Annie has had an encouraging response from members who are prepared to volunteer in some way for School Food Matters who have confirmed that the funding is in place for us to do this in this coming year.

After much discussion, we decided that in the light of Covid uncertainties, lack of finalised agreement with Holland Park, huge demand, and a desire not to overload us with more work, we decided that courses will be a mix of Zoom sessions for theory and practical sessions in LBKA apiaries for up to 60 people. The content of the course will be similar to previous years, with a stronger emphasis on the London Bee Situation.

Education Matters

This important announcement is repeated from last month.

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

2022 BBKA Basic Assessment

Both the BBKA and London Beekeepers Association encourage members to take the BBKA basic assess-

ment where possible. The BBKA requirement for entry is that the applicant has been managing 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 managing bees for a minimum of 12 months and wishes to take this assessment please confirm by email to 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 the spring for members wishing to take the examination. This is likely to last for 3 evenings (2 hours per evening) in early April. The assessment 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

We are running a 3 evening Module 1 revision course (dates to be decided) in February 2022.

These are written examinations, each on a different aspect of beekeeping, and will be held in March 2022. The LBKA usually offers tuition to members wanting to take one of these examinations and will continue to do so this winter. 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 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 is not something that can be decided and pursued at

the last minute. Those who may be interested should contact me now.

Forthcoming intentions (all subject to Covid) for 2022

Microscopy skills and testing your bees for Nosema is currently the topic for the March 2022 monthly meeting.

There will be an **Improver Course** to be held at one of our apiaries, probably in May 2022. This will be a practical tuition in reading a colony and aimed at beekeepers wishing to improve their post Basic practical skills. It is aimed at those who have been keeping bees between 2 and 5 years or more.

Bee Health Day will be scheduled for May and expected to last for a full day. Practical aspects include a full brood disease inspection. This has been a regular event in the LBKA calendar but we have not been able to run it for the last 2 years due to Covid restrictions.

Monthly meetings will continue to be part of our core education policy in 2022.

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

The Microscopy Course has been cancelled due to lack of interest.

January in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

January is a quiet time for beekeepers but an eye must still be kept on the apiary. Make sure that the roof has not been blown off by winds or that anything else is wrong with the hive. I tend to call in about once a week / fortnight in winter but just to check all is OK. Never to open the bees.

Woodpecker damage. This is more likely to occur when the ground is hard as they cannot find insects in the earth and so turn their attention to beehives instead. The green woodpecker, *Picus viridis*, is the culprit. Woodpeckers frequent my apiary and have been seen sitting on my hives. However, they have never been a problem as not the green woodpecker variety.

Varroa strategy. If not already done in December then

Oxalic Acid should be administered in early January. The time to open the hive and administer takes less than 1 minute as the bees are in a cluster. As always, it is essential to wear a veil when opening the colony to treat. Do not take chances. The application sets the colony back a little and should not normally be administered after mid-January as the colony is then building up for Spring. I did mine mid-December after the prolonged and unusual cold snap. Stephen's inspection at the end of December suggests that the first part of December was the best time to treat this year.

Check ventilation. If the air vents are blocked then ventilation will be impeded, leading to internal damp. Cold does not kill bees but damp does!

Wax Moth damage. Check stored frames for evidence of wax moth infestation.

Food stores. If the colony went into the winter with the recommended 35lb of stores then feeding will not be necessary. If stores are light then only candy or fondant should be used at this time of year. (Sugar syrup should be avoided as it will excite the bees and so disturb the cluster. The bees are also unable to process syrup in winter and it is then liable to fermentation). Feeding is not usually necessary in January unless the colony went into winter with too few stores. However, be mindful that this in mild winter where bees have been flying more than usual, stores may get used up sooner.

New equipment. Those who have purchased equipment during the winter sales can assemble frames, etc. It is surprising how quickly events can move when the bees get going in spring and ready assembled equipment keeps the beekeeper ahead of any eventuality. Some suppliers may have a January sale so it is still worth checking out the websites. Late autumn and winter is a far better time to buy equipment than in May or June.

Site location. Those members who are looking to acquire bees for the first time this spring should try to find a suitable site now so that all is in situ for when the bees arrive. It is not a good idea to have bees on their way and still be trying to find a suitable location.

Site relocation. January is a good time to relocate a hive as the bees are not flying. Relocation within the apiary itself or within a 3 mile radius can also be done at this time but only if there is a prolonged severely cold spell. This does not seem to be an option currently available to us with our changed climate. There needs to be a severe cold spell for at least 1 week after the move if moving a colony within the same apiary.

Candles and honey recipes. For those who process beeswax then winter is the usual time of year for this activity. Honey foodstuffs can, of course, be prepared and eaten at any time of year.

LBKA events. Keep in touch with others at our monthly meetings and winter lectures. Full details are on the website.



Congratulations to Lucie Chaumeton for winning this specially-commissioned drone. Photo: Lucie Chaumeton.

Education. Education and practical experience are the 2 routes through which beekeepers develop their skills. Education may arise from a variety of routes but the Beecraft magazine is a substantial resource. Those members who are already BBKA members will receive a free and informative monthly newsletter by post. The technical standards of both Beecraft and BBKA news is very high. If you keep bees and have not yet taken the BBKA Basic assessment please contact me to register your interest (see page 7).

Christmas Quiz.

What happened at our meeting last month.

Aidan Slingsby
services@lbka.org.uk

Elliot ran the Christmas quiz comprising mainly questions from Howard. The quiz rewarded speed and accuracy. Congratulations to Lucie for being the fastest and most accurate and winning the quiz, taking home the fantastic bespoke drone (pictured) that was commissioned by Elliot on behalf of LBKA. Thanks also to Richard, Annie, Martin, Will, Aidan, Emily and Annette for taking part.



Helenium, the best garden plant for attracting bees



Bellflower, the sole pollen source for Bell Flower Scissor Bee and Harebell Blunthorn Bee

Focus on Forage

Mark tells us what's in flower at this time of year. This article is reprinted from last year.

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

Bee friendly gardening New Year's resolutions

This month's forage blog takes a different direction. There's not much to write about in terms of seasonal forage for bees in the depths of winter when little is in flower and our bees are dormant so for a change my blog takes a look at what we can do to make our gardens better environments for bees all year round going forward into a new year.

Create Habitat for bees

Bees need places to forage and find pollen, nectar, water and propolis and this can be done by planting the right types of flowers for them and incorporating a small



Oregano, the best butterfly plant. The awesome bee-attracting plant also supports other common and scarce species



Knapweed, one of the highest yielding nectar plants. Its cultivated cousin Montana is equally as good and has a very long flowering period lasting all spring through to autumn.

water feature into your garden where bees can gather water.

Another sort of habitat bees need is nesting habitat where they can raise their offspring. For Honey bees this is a hive but for other bees this can be piles of decaying logs in which they excavate a nest burrow, a patch of sandy soil or clay bank for mining bees to dig out a nest tunnel, or bundles of hollow plant stems and cardboard tubes for the likes of mason and leafcutter bees. These nesting habitats can be conveniently catered for in the form of the many pre-fabricated bee nesting boxes available from garden centres and online shops or you can make your own [see my guide how to make homes for solitary bees](#).

Other ideas you could try include making a nesting cylinder for ground nesting bees. You need to invest in a sheet of perforated metal sheeting which you bring together at the ends and fasten together with nuts and bolts to form a cylinder. This is then filled with sand or free draining soil to provide a medium which bees can burrow into. This design allows bees to nest in the top of the planter by burrowing downwards but they



*Cirsium (thistles) are the highest yielding UK native nectar plants and super-important bee forage. Here one is being visited by a male longhorn beetle *Retpela maculata*.*



*Golden rod *Solidago*, the only plant I've ever seen Sharp Tailed Bees frequent*

can potentially also excavate lateral burrows entering through the many perforated holes in the metal sheet. Try using soft and sharp sand, cactus compost or John Innes loam based soil with added sand. You can plant drought-tolerant flowering plants in the top too to provide cover as some bees prefer some vegetation cover near their nests whilst others prefer a more open aspect.

Lastly the final habitat that bees need is over wintering habitat. For bumble bees this is often a shallow hollow excavated in dry soil beneath tufts of grass or piles of decaying vegetation, compost heaps or hollow plant stems for solitary bees. Try not cutting back all your herbaceous perennials in autumn, so leaving some stems intact for insects to hibernate inside the hollow stems. Many solitary bees over winter in their nest chambers.

Plant useful things in your garden

My gardening mantra is either the bees can eat it or we can. If a plant can't fulfil either of these two requirements then it doesn't get a look in! Of course most of the things that we can eat are also beneficial to bees and other pollinators as the majority of vegeta-



Holly, the Male plants are coming into flower now and will continue through spring when the separate female trees also bloom.

bles do also flower and the fruits we eat need the bees to pollinate them.

Plant the best plants for bees

Not all flowers are equally attractive or beneficial to bees and other pollinators. Attractiveness and benefit to pollinators varies a great deal with some plants being 100 times more attractive and useful than the worst. To complicate things not all plants are equally beneficial to all insects due to the shape and morphology of the blooms which may prevent all but a few dedicated visiting bees whilst others contain toxins, the effects from which only certain bee species are immune. Great examples are the foxglove *Digitalis Purpurea*, Comfrey *Symphytum officinalis* and Everlasting Pea *Lathyrus latifolia* which are among the top 10 UK plants for sugar content in their nectar and the amount of nectar produced per hectare (kg of sugar/ha/year). These 3 plants should be a magnet for all bees having the greatest rewarding nectars among British plants. However Fox Glove and Comfrey are plants with deep tubular flowers which prevent all but the longest tongues from accessing their nectar, meanwhile Everlasting Pea has both a deep nectary and tightly lipped flowers which require a long tongued bee with a robust body to enter.

Bulking up your gardens by planting the most attractive and beneficial plants for a broad range of insects will provide the most benefit to pollinators, whilst adding plants which are attractive or of benefit to only a small number of species helps provide food for more fussy specialists – often the species most at risk. There are many bees which are not generalist and will only feed their offspring pollen from a small number or a single species of plant. Plant a mixture of broadly attractive and specialist plants and choose plants which will offer flowers over a long season or plan a succession of flower types throughout the season. See the tables on pages 12 and 13. There are lots more planting suggestions on my [plants for pollinators](#) pages along with download



Solitary bee nest planters.

guides for plants for different types of bees. There are also lots of resources on the [LBKA website](#).

Reduce your reliance on pesticides

Pesticides do have their place but only as a final resort once other means of defeating pests and disease have been exhausted. Try mulching with compost and recycling garden waste to feed plants rather than chemical feeds, try companion planting to ward off unwelcome pests and attract beneficial insect predators over chemical sprays. Pesticides find their way into pollen and nectar and accumulate in social bee colonies where they can exhibit a wide range of symptoms including reduced reproductive success, decreased life span of the individual insects, compromised immune response and tolerances to environmental stressors and increased mortality rates. When buying plants for your garden try and find out from the seller or the grower whether neonicotinoid pesticides have been used in the plant's production – these pesticides are harmful to bees and long lived in the plant and surrounding soil meaning they can have effects on wildlife for many years to come.

Stop being so tidy in the garden

Try not to be too much of a compulsive tidy upper in your gardens. Try leaving small hidden away messy areas where vegetation is not cut back and things are left

Plant variety	Flowering period	Pollinators attracted
Helenium autumnal ^a	July to October	Honey bee, Lasioglossum bees, Hoverfly, 4 species of Butterfly
Oreganum vulgare ^b or Oreganum onites	June to October	Honey Bee, Lasioglossum bees, Andrena bees, Bumblebee, Melitta bees, Hylaeus bees, Hoverfly, 9 species of Butterfly
Agastache foeniculum ^c	July to September	Honey Bee, Bumblebees, 4 species of Butterfly, Hummingbird Hawkmoth, Hoverfly, Flower Bees
Calamint	July to August	Honey Bee, Bumble Bee, Megachile Bees
Lavender Gross Bleu	July to September	Honey Bee, Bumblebees, Lasioglossum Bees, Butterfly
Nepeta	June to September	Honey Bee, Bumblebees, Megachile Bees, Wool Carder Bee, Flower Bees, Butterfly, Mint Moth, Osmia Bees
Echium vulgare	June to September	Honey Bee, Bumblebees, Megachile Bees, Osmia Bees, Wool Carder Bee, Flower Bees, Hoplitis adunca, Lasioglossum, Pollen Beetles
Veronica spicata	June to September	Honey Bee, Bumblebee, Lasioglossum Bees, Hylaeus Bees, Hoverfly, Butterfly
Teucrium hiricanum	June to October	Honey Bee, Bumblebee, Flower Bees, Lasioglossum Bees, Hoverfly, Butterfly, Mint Moth, Swollen Thigh Beetles, Pollen Beetles, Wool Carder bees
Sedum Spectable	August to October	Honey Bee, Bumblebee, Lasioglossum Bees, Butterfly
Solidago ^d and Golden Rod	July to October	Honey Bee, Bumblebee, Xylocopa Large Carpenter Bees, Coelioxys Sharp Tailed Bees, Lasioglossum Bees, Butterfly, Beetles.
Hyssopus	June to September	Honey Bee, Bumblebee, Lasioglossum Bees
Eryngium	June to September	Honey Bee, Bumblebee, Lasioglossum Bee, Hylaeus bees, butterfly, hoverfly, pollen beetles, Solitary wasps
Echinops	June to September	Honey Bee, Bumblebee, Lasioglossum Bees, Hylaeus Bees, solitary wasps
Centaurea ^e (Napweeds and Perennial Cornflower)	May to November	Bumblebees, Lasioglossum Bees, Megachile Bees, Osmia Bees, Hoverfly, Butterfly, Pollen Beetles
Cirsium (thistles) ^f	June to September	Bumblebees, Honey Bee, Andrena Bees, Halictus Bees, Colletes Bees, Flower Bees, Long Horn Beetle, Swollen Thigh Beetle, Pollen Beetle, Butterflies, Solitary wasps

Examples of some of the best plants to attract a broad variety of pollinators. Suggestions based on several years of data collection in studies into flower attractiveness to pollinators conducted by LASI and Rosybee Plants supplemented with results from the Agriland Project along with our own observations over the years in our London Garden.

^aThe most attractive garden plant for bees in 4 years of trials By Rosybee

^bThe most attractive plant for butterflies by LASI and top 10 plants for bees by both LASI and Rosybee trials.

^cThe most attractive plant for bees in trials by LASI.

^dShown by Rosybee trials not to be very attractive to bees however in my own garden I have 3 varieties which attract large numbers of predominantly solitary bees, blue butterflies, solitary wasps, hoverflies and pollinating beetles. On regular visits to the prairie plantings in London's Burges Park and on my regular travels around North America I have witnessed Golden Rod visited by an extraordinary range of pollinators. Solidago is the only plant in my garden on which I have seen sharp tailed bees visit.

^eCentaurea nigra (black napweed) ranked 4th by Agriland project for abundance of nectar produced per Ha and Centaurea montana (perennial cornflower) consistently in top 20 most attractive plants by Rosybee – in addition Centaurea species have long flower season and prolonged usefulness to bees.

^fUK native Plant producing the most nectar according to Agriland Project.

Plant variety	Flowering period	Main benefitting pollinator
Everlasting Pea	May to August	Megachile Bees
Stachys	May to September	Wool carder bee (collects hairs from the plant to carder its nest) Fork tailed flower bee
Bell flowers	May to September	Chelostoma campanularum, Melitta haemorrhoidalis Bumblebees, Honey Bee
Achillea (Yarrow)	May to September	Colletes davisianus wool carder bee (collects hairs from the plant to carder its nest)
Alliums	April to September	Hylaeus Bees Honey Bee, Bumble Bee
Lamium maculatum	March to November	Bumblebees and Hairy Footed Flower Bee
Pulmonaria	March to May	Hairy Footed Flower Bee
Astrantia	April to August	Hylaeus Bees
Asteraceae	April to October	Hylaeus Bees, Colletes bees, Swollen Thigh beetles
Foxglove	April to July	Garden Bumble Bee
Yellow Loosestrife	June to August	Yellow loosestrife Bee Macropis europaeus
Hawksbeard	June to September	Pantaloone bee Dasypoda hirtipes, Red Tailed Bumblebee, Honey Bee, Andrena bees, Osmia Bees

Some examples of plants which are beneficial to specialist species and are a good way to provide for fussy flower visitors to your garden.



Tim Lover awarded MBE in the Queen’s New Year Honours (last year).

a little wilder. This will act as a refuge for invertebrates which are less tolerant of disturbed areas.

Learn to plan ahead

If you want to provide for pollinators in summer then the time to plan your planting activity is now. Decide what space you have, plan what you intend to grow and start placing orders now so that come spring you can have plants delivered and planted that will flower come sum-

mer. Planning ahead is especially important for spring bulbs which are best planted when dormant in autumn, 5-6 months before they will come into flower.

Give no dig gardening a try

Spreading composts and biodegradable mulches onto your soil and allowing worms and other detritivores to take nutrients down into the soil is much more beneficial to most soils over conventional digging in. By refraining from deep digging and only adding organic material to the soil surface we replicate what occurs in nature by creating a nutrient rich, moisture retaining top layer above increasingly mineral based layers of soil. Most plants have the majority of their roots within the top 30cm of soil, even very large trees seldom have roots penetrating deeper than 2-3 feet and they are mainly for anchorage rather than water and nutritional absorption. The benefit to bees in no deep digging is that solitary species nesting in the soil don’t have their burrows disturbed and plants flower better. Digging frequently disturbs the buried seed bank meaning weed species can take hold, whereas no dig gardening results in far less seed bank disturbance and therefore a reduced weed problem. In the United States it has been found that many ground nesting solitary bee populations can triple on no dig farms compared to conventionally tilled crop fields as a result of fewer nest burrows being damaged.

Upcoming events

Saturday 8th January: Winter lecture: How modern beekeeping enhances nectar competition and contributes to species extinction of wild pollinators

18:30 at via Zoom (see your email for a link)

This is a repeat performance for Torben Schiffer, (National Honey Show 2021), from the Julius Maximilian University of Wurzburg. It may be a contentious subject for us, but fits well with LBKA's exploration of The London Situation and desire to discover truly sustainable beekeeping models.

Sunday 9th January: Monthly meeting: Pest and diseases

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

A roundup of what we should be aware of in the coming year in terms of pests and diseases.

Tuesday, 25th January: Pub Social

18:30 onwards at Kings Arms, 25 Roupell St, London, SE1 8TB, a short walk from Waterloo Station (Northern Line).

A nice pub with lots of space that serves food.

Saturday 5th February: Winter Lecture: Man made breeding and selection versus natural reproduction and selection – why modern beekeeping will eventually send the species of honey bees into its demise

18:30 at via Zoom (see your email for a link)

Another challenging lecture from Torben Schiffer, and a timely opportunity to discuss queen rearing, the pros and cons of imported queens, London mongrels and much more. We may not get all the answers, but we should come away with plenty to think about!

Sunday 13th February: Monthly meeting: Varroa Control 2022: spoilt for choice

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

This will be delivered by a guest speaker, Bob Smith from Medway Beekeepers, a former Bee Inspector and Basic assessor to the LBKA. Now with 15 VMD-Approved varroacides, plus multiple application methods, how to make good choices and stay safe!

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:** Simon Saville, admin@lbka.org.uk
- **Education:** Howard Nichols education@lbka.org.uk
- **Membership:** Aidan Slingsby, services@lbka.org.uk
- **Events:** Annie McGeoch, events@lbka.org.uk
- **Apiaries:** Tristram Sutton, apiaries@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Elliot Hodges, mentor@lbka.org.uk
- **Resources:** Will Fry, resources@lbka.org.uk
- Stuart Kennon, 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.

