



# The London Beekeepers' Association

# LBKA News

## From our chair



by Karin Courtman

Most people seem to have treated their bees with oxalic acid this year. Perhaps the fact that it was such a low swarm year means that there wasn't the brood break that somewhat checks varroa build up and so varroa numbers are higher? A few members have reported very high drops after the oxalic treatment, despite having treated with Apiguard in the Autumn.

The LBKA bees seem to be doing OK. There will only be one or two nucs available for buying in the Spring however, due to the low number of swarms collected. Bromley BKA say that they had very few call outs to swarms too. Sadly a few people have already lost bees this Winter, but the highest risk time is during February and March due to starvation, so make sure that they have fondant on if they are short of stores. The bulbs we planted in Archbishop's Park are just peeping through the ground, so we will have something to show for our hard work soon. Thanks to all the Newsletter contributors and to Aidan for pulling it together.



## Announcements

### Monthly meetings

In response to feedback we received from last year's members' survey, we're refreshing the monthly meeting content. We'll be introducing more "intermediate level" topics and plan to offer other options at meetings including parallel sessions, some of which will make use of the garden. In addition, we plan a couple of Saturday practical workshops at LBKA apiaries. Further details are on the website and will be reported in subsequent issues of the newsletter. If you've got any comments or suggestions, please email Howard at [education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk).



**Next month's meeting** on 9<sup>th</sup> March will be about how to tackle Nosema. We will provide information about how to tackle Nosema and help test your bees for it using microscopy. Members who wish to have their bees tested should bring along 30 or so freshly dead bees. Catch flying bees as they return to the hive in a polythene bag and place in the fridge overnight to kill humanely.

### Offers of sites for beekeeping

We occasionally get offered sites for using as apiaries. If you have enough experience and are interested in having use of an out-

apiary, please contact Angela at [admin@lbka.org.uk](mailto:admin@lbka.org.uk). Also contact Angela if you've a suitable site that we can try and find beekeepers for.

### Courses and mentoring



Our **Introduction to Beekeeping** weekend courses are now almost sold out. Hands-on experience is essential for successful beekeeping and that's why we offer a year's mentoring for those who complete the course and want to start keeping bees.

Mentors are experienced beekeepers, who are generous enough to devote time to teaching new beekeepers and who get a great sense of satisfaction from passing on their experience and knowledge. **We always need new mentors.** If you're interested in becoming one, please contact Tristram on [mentoring@lbka.org.uk](mailto:mentoring@lbka.org.uk). We're particularly short of mentors in North, West and Central London.

We are looking for volunteers to help out – contact Jon at [treasurer@lbka.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@lbka.org.uk).

### Exams

**We help members** prepare for their British Beekeeping Association certificate



exams. The exams are not too onerous and can be a pleasant way to continue beekeeping activities during Winter. They do require preparation – you could say “fail to prepare then prepare to fail”. Alternatively, you could say “apply a small amount of commitment then prepare to pass”!

We recommend all members who have kept bees for at least a year to take **BBKA Basic**. We will even pay for your exam entry fee if you pass! The exam is likely to be in May. If you're interested in learning more about this or taking the exam, please email Howard at [education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk). No obligation at this stage.

Several LBKA members are sitting the **Module 1 (Honey Bee Management) exam** in March and are now part of the LBKA weekly revision sessions with Howard, which commenced in January. It's a bit late to register for the exam (deadline 10<sup>th</sup> February), but there's always next year.

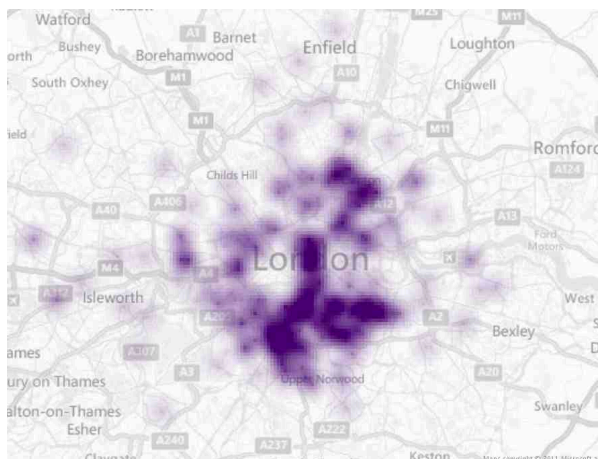


### Call for volunteers

LBKA is entirely run by volunteers and as most are aware, we do a lot more than just look after ours and the association's bees. From training days to tea and coffee making, monthly meetings to school visits, planting days to selling our wares... this year we are looking at another full and fun year and are **looking for people to help and support our wide and varied schedule.**

We have a large (currently 241 members) and diverse membership with members and their hives in Central London, Greater

London and further afield and we'd like to encourage more members to become more involved.



We have a number of specific roles that we need help with: **stock control, storage, apiaries, honey sales, external events & shows, swarm coordination and courses.** Even if you don't think you can take one of these on but would still like to contribute, please do tell us. For further information please drop Jon a line on [treasurer@lbka.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@lbka.org.uk).

### **It's your newsletter!**

Thanks to Emily for editing the newsletter over the past year. Aidan has now taken on this role, but Emily will still continue to provide support.

We are looking for **new contributions from members** to LBKA News to make it more interesting. Have you been to an interesting event that you'd like to write-up for us? Do you have a good or bad beekeeping experience you'd like to share with us? Do you have an interesting point of view? Have you read some interesting research that you can share with us? Are you willing to write up monthly meetings and other LBKA events? Do you have some nice photographs of your apiary, bees, flowers or anything else of interest?

I'd be interested in **one-off articles** and for **volunteers that I can call** upon to help write regular features, such as writing up the previous month's meeting.

To discuss ideas for new articles or to be on our regular contributor list, please email Aidan at [newsletter@lbka.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@lbka.org.uk).

Many thanks to Howard, Mark, Angela and Karin for their contributions this month.

## **February in the Apiary**

*by Howard Nichols*

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

February is a time of increasing activity. Not so much for the beekeeper but for the bees. Although cold, bleak and rainy (very rainy) on the outside, and, to all appearances all appears to be very quiet, a lot is happening inside the cluster. The main job of the beekeeper is to keep an eye on stores. Bee colonies are more likely to die out in February or early spring due to starvation, not due to the cold.

The queen will now be laying at an increasing rate. The empty cells inside the cluster will have been prepared and eggs are being laid. The temperature of a broodless cluster is maintained at 20°C but a cluster with brood requires a 35°C temperature. This also consumes more stores.

If feeding is necessary then fondant is probably still the best bet. If, on a warm day, the bees are flying and emergency stores are required then feeding liquid stores is a possibility. Bees carry and metabolise nectar at 50% concentration. 1kg of sugar dissolved in 1 litre of water will give this concentration and so involve the bees in the minimum amount of work. If stores are not required then it is better not to feed liquid syrup so not to cause any disturbance.



On a warm February or early March day the bees will fly for forage. Main sources in February include snowdrops, crocus and early flowering hazel. The latter is a godsend when it flowers as it provides an abundance of pollen. If your bees have been foraging hazel then they will be coming back to the hive drenched in surplus bright yellow pollen. All these sources provide pollen only. Not nectar.

Dead bees about! Late February or early March is a challenging time for bees. The winter bees are old but now need to work at an increasing rate to feed larvae and young bees. Many of these older bees will be dying off and a disproportionate number will die in the hive. It is not unusual to find a large quantity of dead bees in front of the hive or behind the mouseguard. Just lift the mouseguard and brush out. This should not normally be cause for concern and does not mean that the colony is dying out. If you keep your hive on a concrete or stone floor then the quantity of dead bees may appear to be substantial.

If kept on grass then there may well be just as many dead bees but they will appear substantially less.

### Other jobs to do.

- Carry on reading the beekeeping books.
- Have an outline plan for the forthcoming season. Have a strategy to develop or improve a particular beekeeping skill.
- Assemble frames and ensure you have sufficient equipment for the season.
- Do not forget the LBKA monthly meetings and the mid-week spring lecture series.

## February in the forage patch

*by Mark Patterson*

Normally the coldest month of winter, this January has been surprisingly mild and this has resulted in an unusual flurry of early flowering plants. Already by mid-January,



Old fashioned open flowered Camellia, a source of pollen at this time of year



Snow drops, a source of pollen for bees



Crocus, valuable pollen.



Hazel catkins, a valuable source of pollen.

Daffodils have been sited at several locations around inner London in full flower. Whilst looking pretty and raising our spirits as a promise of spring they are of very little value to our honey bees which tend to ignore them. Buff tailed Bumble bees may however visit them to collect pollen. More useful to our honey bees are the early emergence of crocus, Winter Aconite and snowdrop. All of these provide pollen for our bees at a time when they need protein to support brood rearing. Some of these early flowers like winter aconite also provide small amounts of nectar, though the quantities are so small it makes little difference to our honey bees who are still living off their stores of honey within the hive.

Other plants already out in flower well ahead of time include sweet violets which honey bees and solitary bees will visit to collect nectar, primrose, hellebores and Anemones.

Shrubs in flower at this time of year are a valuable source of forage. Hazel catkins are a good source of highly nutritious pollen to bees, Mahonia and Viburnum Tinus offer both pollen and nectar. Sarcococca Shrubs are coming into flower and attract honey bees with their sickly sweet scent and offer nectar in reward for pollination. Later in the Month early tulips and flowering quince may make an appearance if the weather continues to be mild. Wall flower bowles mauve already in flower may attract honey bees but is much more attractive to early emerging bumble bees and solitary bees such as the Hairy Footed flower bee.

Jobs to do in the garden this month include aerating the soil to improve drainage and allow plants roots to breath. The very wet winter means soils will be compacted and thick. Cut back the now long dead stems of herbaceous perennials to give the new shoots emerging from the crown room to grow and reach the light.

Now that the birds have picked the last of the fruits and berries clean from the trees



Winter aconite provides both pollen and nectar



Sarcococca attracts honey bees with its strongly scented flowers

it is a good time to prune back fruit trees and summer flowering shrubs and hedges. If your looking to invest in some new plants to attract bees into your garden this summer then the lovely people at <http://www.rosybee.com/> have a good selection and including a range of collections packs. They are taking orders for Late April delivery now.

## To Buy or Not to Buy?

*by Howard Nichols*

No! Absolutely not! It is not a misquote from Shakespeare. Now is the time of year that many beekeepers plan their Spring beekeeping and purchase additional equipment. This short article considers the main ups and downs of choosing a Queen Excluder. They may be contrasted as either wired versus slotted or framed versus unframed. This is viewed from the latter but does overlap with the former.



## Framed Queen Excluders

These are usually wired and have fewer problems with propolis. As it has a bee space either side of the excluder (if correctly placed, not upside down) then bees tend not to put propolis there.

- Due to lack of propolis then it minimises disruption to the bees when taking off during a manipulation.
- If the beespace is not properly maintained at the top of the brood box then the bees may build comb between the wire and the top of the super frames. This is a disadvantage only if the other hive parts are not properly constructed or maintained.
- Framed excluders are more robust than unframed. They do not distort.
- Framed excluders are usually made of wire and this allows better access for the bees going up into the supers. There are more "slots" for the bees to pass through. More chance of damaging the excluder when taking off. It is easy to damage the wood with the hive tool.

## Unframed Queen Excluders

- These are considerably cheaper and often cost under £5.
- Both plastic and metal types are available, giving a greater choice.
- Choice of cleaning methods available for the metal variety (blowtorch or washing soda) but restricted to washing soda only for the plastic variety.
- Easier to scrape off propolis as can be kept flat with the ground when cleaning.
- More difficult to take off the colony as they often need to be "peeled off" the brood box whereas framed can just be loosened in each corner then twisted. This added difficulty can disrupt the bees and interfere with the manipulation.

No doubt there are other Pros and Cons that could be mentioned. This brief contrast is to aid members when making a

decision. It is not a recommendation for any particular type of excluder.

## Last Month's Meeting

*by Howard Nichols*

*A summary of last month's meeting to keep those who couldn't make it informed about what went on and what was discussed. We'd like volunteers to help us produce one of these every month. Please email [newsletter@lbka.org.uk](mailto:newsletter@lbka.org.uk) if you can help out.*

The January meeting is always a difficult meeting to administer, as there are no related monthly beekeeping topics. In previous Januarys we have had a variety of topics, ranging from First Aid treatment for bee stings (and more serious anaphylaxis) to the preparation of beeswax products. This month, after a great deal of consideration, the committee decided on a slide show. We are indebted to Gerry Collins of Doncaster Beekeepers Association who kindly supplied us with a series of 30 slides (and answers) illustrating brood diseases and conditions. Due to time constraints we were only able to view the first 20 of these slides.

The meeting took the form of a simple non-competitive quiz. Sheets of paper were distributed and the slides then briefly shown. Each person wrote down what they thought the condition might have been. We then went back to the beginning and discussed each slide in the light of the supplied answers. The idea was to use the slides as a discussion focus and education tool, not as a competition. In fact each person kept his/her initial answers private.

The subsequent discussion around each slide was varied with many people contributing. The most important concept was to be able to recognise healthy brood. Anything that deviates from this standard is, prima facie, suspicious and warrants further attention. The one slide showing healthy brood was treated as the benchmark.

Other contributions by members were varied and covered a broad range of topics including:

- Difference between *Nosema apis* and *Nosema cerana*.
- Winter starvation v Summer starvation.
- Difference between a disease and a condition.
- Statutory obligation to notify suspicion of EFB, AFB or either of the 2 notifiable pests to the authorities.
- Importance and beekeeper benefits of registering with Beebase.
- Visible difference between Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus Types 1 and 2.

After the main part of the meeting had finished we continued with our usual informal and friendly chat over a cup of tea. To any new members who have not been to our Sunday monthly meetings please do come along and give it a try. You will find a friendly atmosphere and informative and passionate discussion about many beekeeping aspects.

## **Swarms**

*by Angela Woods*

Swarm season may be some way off yet but I'll soon be getting my annual request from the BBKA to supply a list of approved swarm collectors. I wanted to explain how it works.

The BBKA used to let unvetted beekeepers apply direct but scrapped that system after it became clear that many keepers were inept or simply scooping up swarms and passing them on as sub-standard nucs. In these recessionary times it was reported that some people who were not even beekeepers got onto the BBKA swarm list looking to make a quick buck. Anyhow, each Association has to give fair coverage of its patch. For us means north, south, east and west.



Anyone can apply but you must know how to catch swarms and be good at it because we get some really odd call outs. I have collected swarms from shopping centres, bicycles, school playgrounds and Piccadilly Circus. You need to be able to react quickly, have your kit, have transport and understand the perils of the task whilst all the time representing the LBKA in a positive way.

The BBKA has a protocol which stipulates that swarm collectors are not allowed to charge a fee for collecting swarms or to sell swarms onto a third party. I have had people offer to pay but asked for donations to Bees for Development. Thinking about the number of boxes of chocolates I have been offered as a 'thank you' makes me feel

a bit queasy. Swarm collecting is always a challenge, always unpredictable but always fun.

Once we have put forward our list a central volunteer coordinates us all or if you've been called direct (and you will get A LOT of calls about bumblebees) that coordinator has to be informed. All our swarms go to Swarm HQ in SE London. If you are picking up a swarm late evening it often means getting back home after dark. I had one week of collecting swarms on five consecutive days. For each swarm the collector is paid £20 to cover their costs.

Each precious swarm is lovingly nurtured, fed, checked for a good laying queen and treated for varroa. Only when it has reached the BBKA standard is it sold on to other members at a discounted rate.

There are a number of opportunities here for members. We'll need collectors. And we always want to teach others so make it known that you might want to go along and observe or help out. Developing the swarms into viable colonies requires a great deal of hard work and we particularly want help in looking after them. This represents a great learning opportunity for someone.

No doubt, we'll be demonstrating swarm collection techniques as part of a monthly meeting like we did last season.

Thank you to Liz Gill for the great job of being the main point of contact for swarm-related queries and for coordinating swarm collection. **We're looking for a volunteer** to take over this challenging role. If you're interested, please discuss with Angela at [admin@lbka.org.uk](mailto:admin@lbka.org.uk).

## Musings of a beekeeper

### Thoughts for February

*by Simon Wilks*

This time of year, though it's cold, wet and miserable, is a metaphorically sunny one for beekeepers. For it's far too early to be

bothered with doing anything, and although those rueful lists of all the things we forgot to buy in the sales keep appearing, unwritten, in our minds, they can safely be ignored in February. If Christmas and/or Self-Assessment haven't robbed us of what we had, they'll have forcibly reminded us of what we haven't. That's why now is traditionally the time when beekeepers enjoy a few days on the Devon Coast, or somewhere equally bracing, to restore minds and bodies sorely ravaged by the labours of last Season.

For the stay-at-homes, those for whom even that hope has been stolen by relatives or the Inland Revenue, there are a few things we can do to either salve what consciences we have, or get us out of the house, which are no doubt covered in sober detail elsewhere. We can go and see if our hives have been stolen and, if they haven't, lift the lids and see if the bees have eaten all their fondant yet. We might even clean the floors, if we're wise enough to have mesh that slides out. Because, though our bees are usually good at clearing away the dear little corpses, at this time of year there's a shortage of labour. And, as often as not, those dear little corpses will be stuck to the floor in a delicious ooze of suppurating candy, which would make them tricky enough to shift even if the dear departed hadn't got their lovely legs woven through the mesh as if on purpose. Scraping them off is a useful task, both hygienically and morally.

But, apart from those minor chores, we can sit back and take languid pride in our achievements. First, because idleness and the appearance of idleness are two very different things and, by now, we should have found the knack of surrounding ourselves with serious-looking books, leaving copies of syllabi lying about as if we planned to read them, and cluttering front rooms and airing cupboards with all the vital, mysterious and busy-looking paraphernalia of the industrious beekeeper. Second, because we've yet to make any serious mistakes so far this year,



and that's something to be celebrated, however briefly.

This year has been especially kind to the idle, on account of weather that's made it impossible to step outdoors without both waterproofs and grim necessity, while remaining what the forecasters call mild. This has had two, more or less profound, effects. The first is that our bees, which are able to cunningly exploit fragments of sunshine too short to be visible to humans, have done some of their own foraging for a change. Whether bees feel guilt, or even a sense of decency, is open to debate, but it's nice to think the possibility remains.

The second is that our bees have had more opportunity than usual to catch and foment each and every possible variety of pest and disease, thus preparing themselves for a proper bout of spring dwindling. It's sad, but it does happen. And so the wise beekeeper, not being of a chicken-counting or fate-tempting turn of mind, will not see the need to buy and hammer up dozens of frames on the off-chance they'll still have colonies to shake or Bailey change. It may be different in March, or August, or whenever the frisky Spring turns up, but now it's all tea and biscuits and the idle contemplation of the NBUs merry warnings of Imminent Death, and that's exactly as it should be.

Sadly, the bees aren't necessarily so idle. In many ways, that's a good thing, for a good part of the human-bee relationship relies on the bees doing most of the work. But it does mean that if we're not worrying about disease, we're worrying about management, as healthy bees can be as much of a wholesale nuisance as sick ones. Those with calendars will see that they'll have been building up for about six weeks now, and if we've obeyed the guidance and have them down on single-brood, with shook swarms or Bailey changes planned for some indefinable point perhaps towards the end of March, it might be useful to add to our idle contemplations the cheery reminiscence that, only a couple

of years ago, the first swarms pitched up in February.

## LBKA-forum

*by Aidan Slingsby*

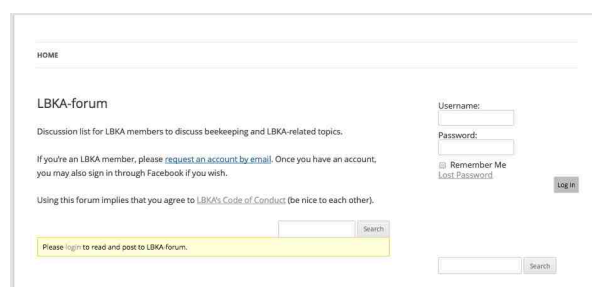
Our Facebook page is already an excellent means of discussing beekeeping-related issues with anyone interested in beekeeping in London.

Some members suggested that they would find an official forum only open to members useful, as it could be used to discuss LBKA-related issues and be a more private place to share information.

This is where **LBKA-forum** (<http://lbka.org.uk/forum/>) comes in. It is a new web-based forum which is **only accessible to LBKA members**. We're launching this for a trial period and will see how it goes.

Members have to opt-in to use this. To opt-in and obtain an account, for more information or more help, please send an email to [webmaster@lbka.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@lbka.org.uk). If the email address matches that of your Facebook account, you can log in using Facebook.

We also have plans to enable members (who wish to) to share their contact details with other members and to find out who lives locally. Forming informal local networks of beekeepers helps make beekeeping much easier, and we hope to help facilitate this. More details will be available once we have them.



## Upcoming events

We list our events and some other organised by others that we think are of

interest to members. **If you have any suggestions**, please email Aidan at [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk). See <http://www.lbka.org.uk/events/> for the most up-to-date events information.

### 8<sup>th</sup>-16<sup>th</sup> February: Snowdrop Days at Chelsea Physic Garden

10:00-16:00 at Chelsea Physic Garden, 66 Royal Hospital Road, London SW3 4HS

Chelsea Physic Garden celebrates a snowdrop extravaganza in their garden every year. Dozens of fascinating types can be found on the Snowdrop Trail and on display in the Snowdrop Theatre. A wide selection of snowdrops and other winter-flowering plants will also be on sale. *More details at <http://chelseaphysicgarden.co.uk/special-events/snowdrops-days/>*

### Monday, 17<sup>th</sup> February: Bees for Development, London Supporters' Group

19:00 at 11 Bonnington Cafe, Vauxhall Grove, London SW8 1TD

An informal group for supporters of the Bees for Development (BfD) charity, with the aim of fostering London based support and fundraising for BfD. Please register if you want to come by emailing [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk).

### Tuesday, 18th February: Bee research

19:30 at Kent House Road Leisure Gardens (opposite Woodbastwick Road) 91a Kent House Road, Sydenham, Kent SE26 5LJ.

*We have been kindly invited by Bromley and Orpington BKA to this talk. Dr Stephan Wolf will tell us about his work which includes putting tiny radar antennae on to honey bees to track where they go.*

### Saturday, 22th February: Middlesex Federation Day

10:00-16:30 at Harrow Arts Centre, Uxbridge Road, Hatch End, HA5 4EA

Harrow Beekeepers have invited us to their Federation Day. Highlights are talks by Ged Marshall, Terry Clare and David

Aston. Admission fee is £10. *More details at <http://www.harrowbeekeepers.co.uk/content/2014-middlesex-federation-day>.*

### Sunday, 9th March: Monthly meeting: Nosema

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

Information and free testing of your bees for Nosema using microscopy.

## Committee

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with a member of the committee if you have any questions, requests, suggestions (and offers of help!), but remember that we are all volunteers with busy lives. We are Karin Courtman (chair; [chair@lbka.org.uk](mailto:chair@lbka.org.uk)), Jon Harris (treasurer; [treasurer@lbka.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@lbka.org.uk)), Angela Woods (secretary; 0785 026 3077; [admin@lbka.org.uk](mailto:admin@lbka.org.uk)); Howard Nichols (education; [education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk)), Aidan Slingsby (members' services and web; [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) and [webmaster@lbka.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@lbka.org.uk)), David Hankins (membership secretary; [membership@lbka.org.uk](mailto:membership@lbka.org.uk)), Richard Glassborow (apiaries' manager; [apiaries@lbka.org.uk](mailto:apiaries@lbka.org.uk)) and Mark Patterson (forage officer; [forage@lbka.org.uk](mailto:forage@lbka.org.uk)). Our website is <http://www.lbka.org.uk/>.

