



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

December, 2015

Welcome to December's issue of the newsletter! This month is a slightly shorter issue than usual, but we have the regular contributions – thanks to those to provide those month-after-month. There are also a few new newsletter contributors coming soon. Ted Parkes is one of these – see his brief introduction on page 9. Mark has also been busy applying to a grant on behalf of LBKA (p3) and also going along to the “Halting the Decline of Bees and Other Pollinators” Symposium (p9). A member selling bees for next Spring on page 14. And Emily's been revisiting Roald Dahl.

Since the last newsletter, we've had our Annual General Meeting and a new committee which is unchanged from last year – see page 2. **The LBKA committee wishes you a very merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.**

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A big thank you to all this month's contributors: **Richard Glassborow, Howard Nichols, Ted Parkes, Mark Patterson and Emily Scott.** We're always looking for new and interesting contributions – please contact me if you're interested.

Aidan Slingsby
Editor
services@lbka.org.uk

From our Chair

Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk

Honeybees are supposedly one of the most sociable organisms on the planet. Yet – as far as I am aware – with no hierarchy, political organisation, or social management. They just seem to get on with what needs doing. Humans are not like that and seem to also include beekeepers! Honeybees have been doing their thing for give or take 35 million years, *Homo sapiens* quarter of a million. I raise this because all is not well with our umbrella organisation the BBKA. Why does this concern us? Well, for one we all pay £21 a year capitation and every year it seems the BBKA want to raise that. Questions are now being asked by the membership associations, and not just about the capitation fee.

It is not appropriate to go into the detail of all the issues here: the paperwork documenting all the complaints, claims and counter-claims can be measured in tons and to be honest I have not got my head around it. For any of you interested we have started collating documents (see your email for details). The reason for doing this now is the Annual Delegates Meeting (ADM) 2016 is on



Winter cherry. Photo: Mark Patterson

January 9th. The papers we have loaded for your fire-side Christmas reading include the 2016 ADM Standing Orders, 2015 ADM Minutes, financial reports, activity reports, etc., etc. We also include some documents that will start to give a flavour of some of the unease between some of the executive Trustees and members. The issues include financial mismanagement, potential fraud (personally I think bungle is more likely), and that some of the executive are arrogant and out of touch with the membership. It should be pointed out that there is also discord within the Trustees, so nothing is simple.

I am trying to keep an open mind until I understand better, but I will say that I was quite shocked at the mishandling of the issues by the senior executive and their attitude towards members, especially at a Special Delegates Meeting last June.

It would be easy and tempting to walk away from a mess like this but do remember the BBKA does do good work too, especially in beekeeping education. And they could and should be an important organisation in a good place to fight for honeybees and other pollinators in a world of intensive agriculture and habitat loss. But clearly something has to be done to improve things. I shall be going to the ADM on the 9th January, so please let me have any thoughts you may have in advance of that.

Now to our own business. The committee are in the process of planning the year ahead – meetings, talks, courses and events, etc. Last year we began a policy of inviting more members to get involved on a voluntary basis. This was a huge success and increased the LBKA's capacity for activities and enabled us to start raising our public profile (on behalf of bees). A great many of you have already taken the trouble to indicate interest in helping when you renewed your membership. So a big thank you to all who have already done this, Emily Abbott, our events and volunteers officer, will be getting in touch as the diary takes shape. And encouragement for members who have thought about it but not yet got involved. You won't be asked to do anything you are not comfortable with and the general consensus is that it is fun and rewarding. There is a particular demand we find hard to meet for giving talks to groups and schools. We have prepared a number of talks with props and visual aids and the idea is that new volunteers go out with someone experienced as often as they feel necessary before going solo. Of course, you don't ever have to go solo but can still be invaluable just helping, particularly if we have an observation hive with live bees (when we should have more than one responsible person in attendance).

For our own monthly meetings we have listened to the feedback and are hoping to arrange to hold longer meetings so we can cover more ground and leave time to network and socialise. And we are also trying to answer the need for more intermediary and advanced content and to arrange topics slightly in advance of the time when procedures need to be carried out, giving time to organ-



December's monthly meeting.

ise and prepare in advance. Your feedback on all these matters is always welcome and helpful, formally, when we ask for it, or informally any time by just emailing a committee member.

So, it remains only to thank all our members for making the LBKA the organisation it is and to wish you all a happy Christmas, a prosperous New year and a good beekeeping season for 2016.

Announcements

Upcoming Monthly Meetings

This newsletter is a little late this month, so we already had our December Monthly Meeting. Jon Harris ran a quiz for us and Anya will be writing up what happened in next month's edition (thanks Anya).

Our January monthly meeting will be **Sunday 10th January at 11:00-13:00** at **Fairley House Junior School (220 Lambeth Rd, SE1 7JY)**, on the subject of wax moth and other related topics. The usual tea/coffee and chat will follow.

Outcomes of the Annual General Meeting

Thanks to those who came to the AGM last month. This year, we devoted the whole evening to proceedings and members' questions. Members have already been informed of the outcomes, but here they are again.

We have a new committee which is unchanged from last year

Each committee member stood again for the same position as last year and there were no new candidates for each position. The meeting unanimously accepted the new committee (unchanged from last year): Richard Glassborow (Chair), Emma Nye (Secretary),



January's monthly meeting will be in the white door on the left.

David Hankins (Treasurer), Howard Nichols (Education Officer), Aidan Slingsby (Membership Secretary), Mark Patterson (Forage Officer), Paul Vagg (Resources), Tristram Sutton (Mentoring/Charity) and Emily Abbott (Events). The meeting also accepted the Chair's and Treasurer's reports.

LBKA will apply to become a charity

The motion that proposal that LBKA apply to be a charity was unanimously passed. The committee will proceed with the application and we'll inform members about progress.

LBKA to change the charity it supports to REViVe

The motion - that proposed that LBKA change the charity it supports to REViVe (through BDI), commit to £300 per year for the next 3 years plus an additional £500 for this year - was unanimously passed. REViVe is a research project that is investigating how and why some colonies seem to be coping with varroa infestations and whether we can use the findings to help manage the effects of varroa in our colonies. More details at <http://www.beediseasesinsurance.co.uk/research/revive>.

Beekeeping courses in April and May

We're having a course bonanza in April and May! We will run two weekend beekeeping courses and two half-day "taster" courses. Full details of the courses and how to book are at <http://www.lbka.org.uk/courses.html> – they sell out quickly! Do tell people who you think might be interested. We'll be asking members if they are willing to help run the courses closer to the time.

LBKA membership

Don't forget that our membership year ended in September. If you need help or clarification about your



Tesco Local Community Schemes whose grants are managed by Groundwork.

membership, please drop Aidan a line on services@lbka.org.uk.

Your feedback

We thank you for the feedback you provided when re-joining. The committee read and discussed everyone's comments at our last committee meeting. Many comments were positive, there were many useful suggestions, and we are pleased that so many people offered their help. Committee members are now aware of people who've volunteered to help and will contact you when suitable opportunities arise.

We've had good comments about the **newsletter** and we're using these to try and make it even better. Thank you to those who have offered to help write material – I will be in touch. I would also very much like to hear from anyone else with ideas and/or is willing to contribute, even if irregularly.

We have also had a lot of good comments about the **monthly meetings**. The committee is considering some changes to the format to help make them even more useful.

Your feedback (to any committee member) is welcome throughout the season.

Tesco grant

Mark has led on LBKA's application for a grant of up to £12,000 to improve forage for bees of all kinds at Mudchute City Farm. The application took Mark about 18 hours! The farm's grasslands once held notable assemblages of wild flowers including several locally and nationally rare species. Due to inappropriate fertilisation of the fields in the past and lack of a mowing or grazing regime most of the flowers have vanished and grasses now dominate the fields.

If our application is successful we will receive the money in February. The grant will fund the planting of a mixture of native wild flowers in several of the farms grasslands and bulbs and herbaceous garden perennials in a formal area near the farm cafe.

These will all be planted using LBKA, farm and corporate volunteers between March and July.

Alongside the planting were planning to run some meadow management training using a professional scything instructor. This will ensure that the skills needed to successfully manage the new windflower habitats are passed on to the farms staff and local volunteers.

Tools and equipment will also be purchased including a power scythe to enable the farm staff to cut the meadow.

The committee will be informed shortly if our project has been short-listed by Tesco to receive an award and the exact amount awarded to us will be decided through a public vote in Tesco Stores local to Mudchute.

We will keep members informed of our progress.

General Husbandry Course

The Surrey Beekeeping Association are running a **General Husbandry Course** on **13th February** at a cost of **£35**. Full details on page 5.

Talks at Kew

Geoff Hood alerted us the **Kew Mutual Improvement Society Lectures**, particularly to the lecture on **The Effect of Pesticides on Bees** on **8th February** by **Dr Beth Nicholls** of University of Sussex (who kindly gave one of our Winter Lectures last year). The full programme is available at <http://www.kew.org/sites/default/files/kmis-2015-16.pdf>.

BBKA's "Worker Bee" newsletter

BBKA's latest member e-newsletter is available at <http://tinyurl.com/jb7rqsf>

Old announcements from November

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

BBKA Basic: If you've kept bees for at least a year, we'd encourage you to do your Bee Basic exam. Howard offers coaching to prepare members to take this – email Howard on education@lbka.org.uk for more details.

Honey sales: Cubana Bar Restaurant are looking for good sources of bulk local honey (10-20kg a week) for their new site in Smithfield. If anyone is interested, please contact services@lbka.org.uk.

Honey sales: small delicatessen **Gusto and Relish** are looking for London honey to sell in their SW London shop (preferably local to the shop). If you'd like to find out more, contact Sally on info@gustoandrelish.co.uk or 020 8878 2005.

"Preparing Honey and Wax" talks is organised by Surrey Beekeepers Association - a day of talks about preparing honey and wax on Saturday, 23rd January. Email rickwoods@bka.co.uk

Potential NW3 apiary: Nikki lives next to Hampstead Heath (NW3) and would like to offer it as a site

for one of our members to keep bees. If you'd like to know more, please contact services@lbka.org.uk for more details.

Old announcements from October

Do you have honey to sell? Add it to our list of members with honey to sell – <http://lbka.org.uk/honey.html>) and on page 14.

Bulk honey to sell?: LBKA member Laura Jean may buy it off you for her bee-friendly not-for-profit pop-up dining events – contact her at laurajean@beekindanddine.co.uk or 07590 831666.

Beekeepers of the future: BBKA's Ian Homer is looking for help to find the beekeepers of the future – contact him on ian.homer@bbka.org.uk.

Old announcements from September

A Clapham delicatessen: A Clapham delicatessen would like to sell local honey – please contact Jon Harris jon1harris@hotmail.com for details and arrangements.

Do you have any announcements?

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

November's monthly meeting

What happened at last month's meeting.

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

Attendance at the meeting was about 30 in number and these ranged from new beekeepers to older, more established beekeepers. Just before 11.00 am we had about 10 people but all had changed within about 10 minutes.

The theme of the meeting was use of Oxalic Acid. This was done by means of Powerpoint slides, practical demonstration and general discussion amongst members. Oxalic Acid may be administered in a variety of ways but we only concerned ourselves with the trickle method so as to keep the discussion more focussed. A variety of topics were addressed during the morning including:

General Husbandry Course

Beyond the Basic – improving your beekeeping skills.

Date; 13th February

Venue: Mitcham (full details will be sent with the booking)

Cost: £25 (SBKA members) £35 (non-members)

This is the first of a two part General Husbandry course is for those that wish to gain further **practical training** beyond Basic, and those wishing to take the BBKA General Husbandry assessment either this year or sometime in the future. The course content assumes delegates will have two or three years' experience.

Its aim is:

- for those using it as final checks before taking the General Husbandry Assessment
- for those starting out to study and prepare for taking the Assessment at a later date, and
- for those simply wishing to gain some further training beyond Basic Assessment level, and may or may not plan to take the Assessment at a later date.

The first day is on Saturday 13th February 2016, is classroom based.

- Describes the relationship of the General Husbandry to the Basic Assessment and to Advanced Husbandry, and the main aspects of the General Husbandry syllabus,
- Outlines the practical apiary environment expected at General Husbandry level and assessment,
- Covers the level of competence expected at General Husbandry level in three of the main areas .
 - swarm control
 - queen rearing theory, and
 - brood disease inspection and management
- There will be hands on demonstrations (without bees) of beekeeping techniques
- Ends with a short quiz.

The main aim for those planning to take the Assessment the following year is for them to be able to assess what further studying and/or revising might be needed over the winter.

The second day will be in the spring, a practical apiary based day, and provides final preparations for those aiming to take their Assessment that year, and to provide an advanced view of expectation for those planning to take the Assessments at a later date or just attending for interest.

Course Leader

Alistair Welch MB NDB

Alastair first recalls an interest in bees when, as a small boy, he came across a swarm of bees hanging in a fruit tree; it was something quite fascinating. This fascination continued but it was many years later, after retiring early from the joinery and shop-fitting industry, that he decided to pursue his interest further by actually taking up bee keeping. Alistair is a Master Beekeeper and the prestigious National Diploma in Beekeeping.

Alistair sits on the BBKA Exam Committee so is well placed give us tips on taking the assessment.

Alistair will be supported by other beekeepers that have recently passed the assessment.

To reserve a place please email Sandra Rickwood: rickwoodsaka@gmail.com

Surrey Beekeepers Association

Founded 1879

Registered Charity no. 1026386

Affiliated to the British Beekeepers Association

Details of Surrey Beekeeping Association's General Husbandry Course.

- A simple and brief overview of varroa and where Oxalic Acid resides in the arsenal of Integrated Pest Management techniques. As we do not have a treatment that will kill 100% of the mites then we have to rely upon a variety of treatments at different times of the year.
- General information on “soft varroacides”, of which Oxalic Acid is one.
- What Oxalic Acid is, where it occurs in natural products.
- How Oxalic Acid kills the mites and also its effects upon the Honey Bee.
- Practical demonstration on application.
- Importance of proper application and subsequent disposal of contents.

The association had purchased Oxalic Acid in the standard 100 ml plastic bottles and these were available at cost to members.

After the main part of the meeting had finished we continued with our usual informal and friendly chat over a cup of tea and cake. 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. The monthly meetings are all included within your membership.

December in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

December is a quiet time for beekeepers but an eye must still be kept on the apiary. Most items detailed in the November newsletter still apply but are not repeated here. If you have been diligent and have gone into winter with a full super of stores above the brood chamber then feeding bees should not be necessary in December.

Keep an eye on the apiary. Those members with an out-apiary should still visit about once a fortnight to ensure all is in order. Ensure the mouseguards are secure and check behind for a build up of dead bees, etc. Check there has been no vandalism, whether of the four legged or two legged kind. Check that nothing is amiss and roofs are *in situ*. Placing a house brick on top of the roof is probably all that is needed, even in strong winds.

Oxalic acid. Varroa treatment with oxalic acid is the main task. Oxalic acid only deals with mites on the adult bees and so must be applied when the colony is broodless or virtually broodless. Late December or early January is the usual time for treatment. It is a strong chemical and manufacturer's instructions should be followed. Misapplication can be harmful to the bees and / or beekeeper. Please carefully dispose of unused contents after use.

Woodpeckers. Woodpeckers may be to be a problem in December if it becomes very cold. It is the green woodpecker *Picus viridis*, which is the main culprit. As the ground becomes harder due to the cold they find it more difficult to dig for insects and can turn their attention to beehives. There are at least 3 options available to the beekeeper if the woodpecker becomes a pest.

- Surround the hive with chicken wire, making sure that the bird cannot get a grip on the wood of the hive through the wire. Recommended option.
- Cover the hive with a large bin liner, polythene bag or sacking but ensuring the bees can come and go. This may interfere with colony ventilation.
- Keep the hive in the type of cage that fruit growers use on allotments, ensuring the holes in the netting are sufficient for the bees to easily pass through. This is a rather excessive approach but the apiary surround is occasionally altered this way.

Water supply. Ensure there is a water supply close to the colony. Bees become immobilised and die when the body temperature falls to or below 7°C. They will make quick flights at outside temperatures below 7°C for toilet purposes or to bring in water. They do this by warming their bodies up beforehand then making a dash for it and returning to the hive before they cool down. The nearer the water supply the better.

Moving the colony. If it is essential to move the colony less than 3 miles then winter is the preferred time. It is better to do this when the weather is forecast to remain cold for at least a week.

Education. Winter is a good time to read your bee books. Even better is to download the Basic syllabus from the BBKA website with a view to taking the exam next summer. Winter reading is a useful beekeeping bridge between seasons. If not already done so the take out an annual subscription for Bee Craft monthly magazine. It is available in both digital and hard copy forms. The latter subscription is delivered to your door and also includes the digital copy anyway.

Review the year. What have I got right? What mistakes have I made? How will I approach my beekeeping next spring in the light of this review?

Finally, and importantly, keep in touch with other LBKA members. We continue our monthly meetings on the second Sunday of each month and all are welcome. You can also join our Facebook page – our **open Facebook page** (<https://www.facebook.com/groups/>)



Winter heliotrope

[2512721609/](#) with over 1800 members from around the world) or our **members' only Facebook page** ("LBKA-forum"; please email services@lbka.org.uk for access) . This is moderated with a light touch only so please do remember to be respectful to all other users. We post and share our failures as well as successes and many members find this both a useful beekeeping resource and social outlet.

December in the Forage Patch

Mark's regular update on what is in flower that bees like. There's less to write about this month, so this month's sections is short.

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

December heralds the start of winter and by now our colonies should be well tucked up for the cold months ahead. Amazingly some colonies appear to still be quite active venturing out in what should be too cool and windy conditions for them. Many bumblebees are also still active and not just the usual buff tailed bumble bees which regularly remain active all winter in London.



Early bumble bee visiting a hebe flower

This past week I've seen common carder queens, early bumblebee queens and workers all foraging on **Mahonia** blossom.

Other plants still in flower include **escalonia**, **viburnums** are in full bloom, **winter flowering cherry** and this past week on my allotments, **winter heliotrope**. Winter heliotrope like most of our winter flowering plants is an exotic plant which escaped and became established in the wild. It can be very invasive if it establishes itself in woodlands, forming dense carpets. In gardens, this ground-covering perennial can be easily kept in check by digging the soil around the clumps. It has a very pungent sweet smell and looks similar to our native butterbur which flowers in early spring. This week the buff tailed queens have been busy working the flowers.

Other things still in flower include the last of the late summer and autumn flowers. In Tower Hamlets cemetery this week I was amazed to see **Nettle-leaved bellflower** still in bloom along with **dandelion**, **hawk weed**, **white dead nettle** and some very early **daffodils**.

Jobs to do

It's becoming late now for planting bulbs and many garden centres will have them on sale at half price. Panted so late they may not produce such a grand display of flowers the coming spring but if fed well they should record and do well the following year.

Now is a good time to take cuttings from shrubs and to divide clumps of herbaceous perennials.

Collect up your fallen leaves to make leaf mulch.

Collect dead hollow stems from plants to use in constructing solitary bee hotels. Now is a good time to do this before they get too rotten over the winter. Take care not to cut through any which may be occupied by moth caterpillars - there will usually be a tell tale sign of occupation in form of a hole chewed into the stem. Good plants for this include:



Honey bee on mahonia

- Sedum spectacle stems
- Helenium stems
- Rhubarb flower stalks
- Cow parsley
- Hogweed (not the giant one!)
- Bamboo
- Teasel
- Elder (remove the pithy centre with a knitting needle)

Instructions on how to make these are on my website:
<http://www.apicultural.co.uk/>.

Annual General Meeting: Chair's report

At last month's annual general meeting, the Chair reported on the association's activities over the past year and looked forward to the coming year. This description is based on the minutes of the meeting.

A fun and busy year

The Chair's Report reported a fun and busy year, in which the association focussed on its members, its organisation, our interest in urban beekeeping and the public's interest in bees and flowers. We ran monthly meetings, published a monthly newsletter, updated the website, organised two winter lectures, ran a summer social, have social media presence and improved our communication to members. We've also given members opportunities for apiary sites, honey sales, opportunities to do paid beekeeping, helped members test their bees for nosema and given them a chance to use our microscopes. We have bought new extractors and microscopes which we hope will benefit our members.

Behind the scenes

There has also been work behind the scenes. We've represented the LBKA at BBKA meetings held through the year, developed position papers on education and mentoring which has helped us to deal with incoming enquiries. We've been doing risk assessments potential apiary sites and gained sponsorship from Ashurst, Neal's Yard Remedies and Nandos, all of these have provided money for forage planting schemes.

Education for members

We have three teaching apiaries and have taken on an additional one in Holland Park. We ran two 'Introduction to Beekeeping' courses, giving 50 mentees the chance to be mentored by 10 LBKA mentors. All 11 members who took the BBKA Basic Assessment under the guidance of our Education Officer, Howard, passed. Our members have collected many swarms this year and deposited them in our newly established swarm apiary, organised and run by Paul Vagg. Some of the feral swarms were in bad shape.

Education for the public

Our website has a page <http://lbka.org.uk/forage.html>) with good flowers for bees. We have given talks and advice on forage for pollinators, and forage planting events that have been sponsored across four sites. We've sold over 1,000 packets of seed mix since 2014.

Outreach

We've reintroduced a bee awareness course, emphasising that a full beekeeping course is necessary for keeping one's own bees. We've given over 13 talks to schools across the city. We've also dealt with over 540 email enquiries from a range of interested parties. We've run five major events at BNPP bank, the Lambeth County Show, Bee Conscious on Clapham Common, Harvest Stomp at the Olympic Park, and the London Honey Show.

Looking ahead

Here’s to another busy and successful year, with some exciting challenges ahead, including our application to become a charity.

Here & there

Ted kicks off his new column in LBKA News.

Ted Parkes
LBKA member

I am very much looking forward to contributing to the LBKA News Letter over the coming months. I hope to be able to bring a Canadian perspective to the issues and challenges that we Beekeepers face and share. There are no shortage of topics from the day to day management of hives, swarming, pests, disease, treatments, forage, weather extremes, selective breeding, neonicotinoids and what ever else that might come up over the course of the next few months.

This is where I should introduce myself. I am a Canadian recently relocated to London. I have been a beekeeper for several years managing 10 colonies on average. I say “on average” because like any of you that have multiple hives it can vary from season to season depending on winter loss, queen loss, swarming and the unknown. My perspective is from that of an Ontario beekeeper. With a country the size of Canada issues regarding colony management can vary greatly. On top of the knowledge gained from keeping my own bees, I was extremely fortunate to have spent a couple seasons working alongside the Ontario Beekeepers Association’s “Technical Transfer Program”. The OBA Tech-Transfer Program operates directly for the beekeepers of Ontario, focusing on issues that are of importance to us beekeepers. Tech-Transfer conduces research and testing working closely with the University of Guelph and the Provincial Apiarist to establish best practices. The objective of this column is to share, inform and hopefully instigate discussion on the topics that are important to the beekeeping community both here and there.



The venue.

Notes from the “Halting the Decline of Bees and Other Pollinators” Symposium

The “Halting the Decline of Bees and Other Pollinators” Symposium was held on 18th November at the Grange Wellington Hotel in Victoria. It was chaired by former BBKA chair and current Director of public affairs Tim Lovett. LBKA sent along our forage officer Mark Patterson along with some LBKA branded literature and seed packets to participate in the discussion.

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

I was pleasantly surprised by Tim Lovett’s opening statement in which he made clear that whilst honey bee numbers have fluctuated greatly over the past 100 years or more that they were presently stabilised and enjoying a period of increased prosperity in the UK. Tim mentioned the huge surge in the BBKA membership, from 8000 a decade ago to the 25,500 strong membership today which makes the BBKA the UK’s largest and loudest voice for concerns about honey bees, beekeeping and pollination. Tim went on to talk about the need to conserve our bumble bees and solitary bees, many of which are in severe declines and, unlike honey bees, do not have beekeepers to care for them. This opening to the symposium was a welcomed change from the usual BBKA rhetoric that honey bees, are in decline and need saving. I felt he gave a very balanced and well-constructed introduction. Tim went on to mention other types of insect pollinators that are equally important for pollination of the nation’s food crops and that among the most important actions needed is the planting of more forage – this was music to the ears of many delegates.

Tim spent about 20 minutes talking the audience

through a brief history of the BBKA's last 30 years from the introduction of varroa which changed UK beekeeping forever and how the association has managed to bring the plight of bees to the attention of government and rally support for their conservation from the British public. He really did make it seem like the BBKA had single handedly 'saved' the bees.

Tim then introduced delegates to our first speaker Matt Shadlow – Chief executive of Buglife – who presented us with some shocking figures on habitat loss since the 1950s and frightening statistics of declines in some once common insect pollinators. Matt pointed out that whilst the spotlight is often focused on the honey bee, many other insects are equally if not more important for pollination services. Matt showed us some results from research which showed that nocturnal pollination by moths accounts for more pollination than that by honey bees visiting many crops during daylight hours. We were given a brief talk through the Bee Lines project. Sadly Matt failed to mention the Bee Line for London which would have been appropriate given the setting of the talk; however most delegates were from outside the London area. Matt produced figures for the amount of pollinator habitat created this far through the bee lines projects in conjunction with environmental stewardship schemes. The amount of new habitat created so far was a 0.3% increase in wild flower meadows vs a 97% loss since the 1950s. This was disappointing given the scale of habitat creation efforts involved which highlighted that there is a great deal of work to do before we can really impact on pollinator declines.

Matt then went on to give a review of what the government's National Pollinator Strategy had achieved... or rather had failed to achieve in its first year since publication. There were two commitments in the strategy that the government said it would lead on. The first was the **establishment of a national recording and monitoring scheme** to generate baseline data on pollinators which would allow for assessment of their conservation status, priority and enable conservationists to decide on appropriate actions to safeguard them. The second was the **renewal of environmental stewardship schemes** to encourage farmers to plant flower strips for bees. Matt pointed out that so far the Government had not spent a penny on setting up this monitoring scheme and had made no indications that funds were being set aside for this project. Matt also pointed out that under the current leadership the government had slashed its budget for environmental stewardship payments to farmers. All the other actions listed in the NPS require a lead or to be solely delivered by non-governmental organisations such as community groups, BKA's and charities. Matt presented us with some examples of actions that were needed to deliver this policy and what progress had been made so far. The NPS has so far been very successful at raising awareness, highlighting the issues faced by pollinators but has yet to secure substantial funding and financial support to deliver practical actions. Matt finished by pointing delegates to various reports available on-line for further information.

Next up to speak was Charles Godfrey – Professor at University of Oxford – who gave an unbiased overview of the various research projects investigating and issues surrounding neonicotinoids use in the UK and their effects on pollinators. Charles pointed out that all neonics when used properly at the correct doses should have no lethal effects on honey bees but as well documented it is the untested sub lethal effects which are damaging to bees. We were shown examples of studies which had taken place, we discussed issues about transparency and the need for more independent and un-biased research in this area. Charles also pointed out that herbicides are more to blame for declines in pollinators than actual insecticides since they have removed most of the flowering weed species which bees rely on for forage in agricultural systems – something I had not considered before. We were then treated to a talk by the marvellous Norman Carreck – Master Beekeeper, National Diploma in Beekeeping holder, Science director at the International Bee Research Association and researcher at LASI university of Sussex. Norman's focus was solely on honey bees but on a global perspective. We were treated to discussions about the need to preserve genetic diversity within the Western honey bee, the issues of importations, bad beekeeping practices, CCD in North America, the importing of foreign queens and how research by COLOSS has shown that localised strains of honey bee perform much better than non-local ones, questioning the need for importing of queen bees. Norman also discussed Varroa and how the mite remains the beekeepers and the honey bees number one enemy. Interestingly Norman showed a table highlighting winter colony losses across Europe recorded through the COLOSS partnership. Most beekeepers reporting losses of hives blamed high Varroa load, Poor strength of colonies going into autumn, winter starvation and poorly laying queens. Only a small minority blamed poor weather and other natural phenomena. Norman pointed out that the majority of those losses could have easily been prevented by the beekeeper if they practiced good husbandry skills. This highlighted the need for better training and education among amateur beekeepers.

The final lecture of the morning was presented by Louise Payton – policy officer for the Soil Association – who gave a presentation on the need to move away from over reliance on pesticides, the need to stop using pesticides prophylactically and the need to implement truly integrated pest management strategies which include pesticides but only as a last resort.

We were presented with some data illustrating how neonics in particular are very persistent in the wider environment, how they leach into soil and can become concentrated at much higher rates in adjacent wild plants than the actual crops they were applied to. Data presented showed how wild flowers growing in flower strips adjacent to Neonic treated Wheat can contain 10× more toxins than that found in Oil Seed Rape plants which triggered the question 'should we be even planting these flower strips around fields treated

with neonics?’ Norman Carreck replied yes to this answer and gave some excellent reasons why.

Louise showed us some data from a Soil Association study which illustrated that when farmers set aside land around their field margins for pollinators by including flower strips they initially lose money because their crop yields go down but after 4 years crop yields typically return to similar yields as previously achieved despite less space used for the crop. Of particular interest was data indicating Field Beans producing substantially greater yields 4 years after flower margins were planted. This was discussed further over the networking lunch and one possible thought was that over 4 years of access to more flowers solitary bee populations are able to increase on the land, and its species like the hairy footed flower bee which are the primary pollinators of field beans which are increasing as a result of the flower strips and helping to produce higher yields in the field beans.

I had lunch with Tim Lovett and Louise Payton during which we discussed the issue of ‘are there too many honey bee hives in London’ and ‘lack of forage.’ Tim was most kind in his praise for the work LBKA have done in raising the profile of these 2 issues and was interested to hear about our attempts to re-balance the situation through our association led planting projects. The day before the symposium I had just submitted a funding application for £12,000 for a future LBKA planting project and Mr Lovett seemed impressed with our efforts. He referred to the LBKA as having gone through a renaissance.

After Lunch the delegates were invited to ask questions and lead on discussion of issues highlighted in the morning’s sessions. Despite attempts by Tim Lovett to not get bogged down with neonics much of the discussion did focus on this area. In the room were agronomists, a farmer, farming and wildlife advisory consultants and a Bayer’s head of public affairs – who to my surprise didn’t make any claims that’s Bayer insecticides don’t harm bees. He was very clear in saying that their products met expectations placed upon them by the regulatory authorities and that they did not pose a lethal threat to bees. He also pointed out that non-lethal side effects were not required testing. The cost of these products to farmers was discussed and there were comments that farmers spend money on these expensive pesticides when they absolutely have to. Comments from the floor made suggestion that agronomists and consultants were driving over use of pesticides through their fee earning percentages they receive when they sell products to farmers using them.

There was a lot of discussion about organic farming and what can be done to provide farmers with incentives to switch to alternative farming and pest management strategies. There was a lot of discussion about the budget cuts to DEFRA and how not enough money is being put into the Environmental Stewardship schemes which incentivise farmers to plant flower strips or whole fields of flowers for pollinators. There was also discussion about the variety of species used in the available polli-

nator seed mixes and how they only cater for a narrow range of bees, which typically are attractive to honey bees and long tongued bumble bees but miss out solitary species and other pollinators. The discussion then moved back to solitary bees and how we can best help them. Both Norman Carreck and myself mentioned the inclusion of nesting sites for these bees and Tim Lovett piped in with further suggestions and the floor shared sources of information on this which could be referenced later on.

After an hour of heated discussion we listened to presentations from David Curry of the Herefordshire Orchards initiative and Margaret Ginman, general secretary of the Bee Farmers’ Association. David talked about the historical links between beekeepers and orchards, the decline of orchards in the UK and Margaret followed with an inspiring informal talk about the Bee Farmers’ Association, the 400 members she represents and the difficulties of bees keeping their beekeepers in business in the current economic climate. We learnt about the new Bee Farming Apprenticeships being set up and how the poor summer had been disastrous for Scottish bee farmers who had failed to make a heather honey crop this year and were facing severe financial hardship. As an amateur beekeeper it was an eye opening talk on the professional side of beekeeping and the differences involved.

The afternoon’s discussion session focused on what we can all do to help fill in gaps in delivering on the National Pollinator Strategy and the hurdles we collectively need to overcome. There was talk about the need for increased forage for bees and Tim Lovett guided the discussion in the direction of the London perspective which enabled myself to stand up and talk on that subject and give some examples of the work our association is doing to encourage planting for bees. I gave examples of excuses why Local Authority parks don’t plant more areas for wild flowers (e.g. a lack of specialist ‘cut and bail’ machines to mow long grass) and we talked about the need for training of green space managers and how community and voluntary organisations can play a part in supporting cash-strapped parks. There were several parks and local authority managers in the room and their ears pricked up when this was discussed.

Delegates in attendance were from a very broad church of organisations, farmers, businesses, academics and policy makers. The one thing that united us all was our desire to save Britain’s declining pollinators.

The event was well worth while attending for our Association. I took along the LBKA vinyl banners, literature resources, seeds and information including photographs of our forage planting activities which I think inspired many who took the time to peruse the materials put out on display. The event was also an opportunity to network with likeminded organisations and individuals involved in pollinator conservation.

November's Facebook (In)digest(ion)

A quick roundup of what's been happening on our open Facebook page. Join us on <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2512721609/>.

Sorry, we've no article here this month. If you're interested in being one of the contributors for this section, please drop Aidan a line on services@lbka.org.uk.

Adventures in Beeland: Royal Jelly – a story by Roald Dahl

Emily's regular guest article from her excellent blog: <http://adventuresinbeeland.com/>. This month, she's been re-reading Roald Dahl.

*Emily Scott
LBKA member*

If you've ever read Roald Dahl's short stories for adults, you'll know they're very different in tone to his more famous children's books. My mum had both his Kiss Kiss and Switch Bitch collections and I re-read them quite a few times as a child, including the story Royal Jelly.

This week I was in the Barbican Library near my work and stopped to check out the returned shelves. One of the books there happened to be Kiss Kiss, so I got it out specially to read Royal Jelly again. As a child my knowledge of bees was basic, so the story had a new fascination now that I'm a beekeeper.

The plot involves a married couple who have just had a long-awaited child. The mother, Mabel Taylor, is "half dead with exhaustion", out of her mind with worry because the baby girl will hardly take any milk. This baby is eating so little that at six weeks old she weighs two pounds less than she did at birth. Then an idea comes to Mabel's husband, Albert. He is a professional beekeeper and whilst reading his beekeeping magazine comes across an article on royal jelly. The article details the wonderful properties of royal jelly, including the tremendous weight gain of a honey bee larva fed on it. 'Aha' thinks Albert – and proceeds to add royal jelly to his little girl's feed. The strategy works, with the

baby greedily lapping up this new formula and crying for more – but this new enriched milk also has some unexpected side-effects.

Reading the story now, I was surprised by how detailed and accurate Dahl's descriptions of bee biology and beekeeping generally were. He must have done a fair amount of research to write the story. For instance, take the articles listed in the contents page from his bee journal: Among the Bees in May; Honey Cookery; Experience in the Control of Nosema; The Latest on Royal Jelly; This Week in the Apiary; The Healing Power of Propolis. The story was first published in 1959 and yet these could be articles from a current journal.

His descriptions of royal jelly were accurate according to scientific knowledge at the time. For example, Albert Taylor explains to his wife that it "can transform a plain dull-looking little worker bee with practically no sex organs at all into a great big beautiful fertile queen". Worker larvae receive pure royal jelly for only the first three days of their lives, after which they are fed a mixture of royal jelly, honey and pollen. In contrast a larva chosen to become a queen receives only an abundance of royal jelly throughout her larval life, so much so that she is literally floating in it.

For years it has indeed been accepted opinion that royal jelly is the miracle food which has the ability to turn an ordinary female larva, laid from an identical egg to her sisters, into a queen. However, some new research published in August 2015 (<http://www.wired.com/2015/09/royal-jelly-isnt-makes-queen-bee-queen-bee/>) suggests that what really matters is what larvae chosen to become queens aren't fed – the pollen and honey their ordinary worker sisters get. In 2008, Australian scientist Dr. Ryszard Maleszka managed to create queens in his lab without feeding them any royal jelly (by silencing a set of genes). One theory is that receiving no pollen provides chemical protection for the queen's ovaries, as she is sheltered from the potential toxic or metabolic effects of plant chemicals.

All this is a rather round-about way of recommending this story to you and also mentioning that in April 2016 I'm expecting a little drone – just in time for swarm season. Having read the story, I will not be feeding him any royal jelly!

References

- "A dietary phytochemical alters caste-associated gene expression in honey bees" (Wenfu Mao, Mary A. Schuler and May R. Berenbaum, Science Advances, 28 Aug 2015: Vol. 1, no. 7). The scientific paper.
- "Royal jelly isn't what makes a queen bee a queen bee" (Gwen Pearson, Wired.com, September 2015). The reader-friendly journalist's version
- "Does royal jelly make royal queens?" Nice explanation of the science from a beekeeper's point of view by the Bad Beekeeping Blog



Queen larva floating in royal jelly.



Uncapped queen cell.



Swarm season

Members selling to members

This section is for members selling things or selling services to others. This could include nucs and wax. Email services@lbka.org.uk for more details.

Jonathan Monnickendam (monnickj@hotmail.com) is selling **two colonies**, available in March for two recent mentored beekeepers, preferably with BBKA Basic. The bees will be on Hoffman national brood frames, have been treated twice with Apiguard and will be treated with Oxalic acid soon. They need to be collected from Gloucester Place (NW1 6DT, near a loading bay, outside the congestion charging zone). Please bring a suitable brood box to take the bees away in. The cost will be £50 which will be donated to LBKA's nominated charity.

Honey for sale

Here's a list of members with honey to sell. Please email services@lbka.org.uk for their contact details or if you have honey you'd like to sell.

Clapham Junction

Jonathan Dale:

- 227g/8oz: £6.00 (or 2 for £10.00).

Hackney (E8)

Jan Fuscoe:

- 8oz/227g: £5

Dulwich (SE21) and Tooting/Streatham (SW16)

Sue Parminter:

- 8oz/227g: £5.00.
- 1lb/454g: £8.50.

Streatham/Mitcham

Emma Nye:

- 8oz/227g: £6

Stoke Newington (N16)

Aidan Slingsby:

- 8oz/227g: £5.00.

Upcoming events

Sunday 10th January: Monthly meeting: All about wax moth

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

This month we'll be talking about wax moth and other related topics, followed by the usual hot drinks, cake and chat. Meetings are for members only, but you're welcome to come as guest to find out more about our association.

Committee

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with a member of the committee if you have any questions, requests, suggestions (and offers of help)! We are:

- **Chair:** Richard Glassborow, chair@lbka.org.uk
- **Treasurer:** David Hankins, treasurer@lbka.org.uk
- **Secretary:** Emma Nye, admin@lbka.org.uk
- **Education:** Howard Nichols education@lbka.org.uk
- **Membership services:** Aidan Slingsby, services@lbka.org.uk
- **Forage:** Mark Patterson, forage@lbka.org.uk
- **Resources:** Paul Vagg, resources@lbka.org.uk
- **Events:** Emily Abbott, events@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Tristram Sutton, mentoring@lbka.org.uk

Our website is <http://www.lbka.org.uk/>.

