



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

July, 2016

Welcome to this month's newsletter. This month, Howard reports on the 15 LBKA members who've passed their Bee Basic (p3) – well done! Thanks are due to Howard, under whose guidance all candidates passed...yet again. We've also got LBKA's position on honey bee declines on p10 and Emily's reflections on what Britain's exit from the EU might mean for bees. We also have the usual regular features including thoughts from our Chair, news about the latest LBKA forage planting event and monthly meeting, what to do in the apiary, what's flowering, what's been going on on Facebook and a new Bee of the Month. Thanks to regular contributors for providing these month after month.

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A big thank you to all this month's contributors: **Natalie Cotton, Richard Glassborow, Martin Hudson, Howard Nichols, Mark Patterson and Emily Scott.**

I'm on the lookout for people to contribute to next month's newsletter. Please contact me if you're able to help out.

Aidan Slingsby
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From our Chair

Richard Glassborow
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I may have spoken too soon last month about the quiet swarm list. There do seem to have been more calls in the latter half of June and they keep coming. But as far as I am aware, nothing on the scale of last year. At Holland Park we have had no swarms where last year there were sometimes two or three a week. We suspected they were feral as none of the queens were marked and their health was very poor and carrying a lot of varroa which is unusual for adult bees. We wondered then about the state of the parent colonies if the swarms were so infested. Perhaps the lack of swarms this year answers that question, the parent colonies probably have not survived.

Meanwhile, the committee is grappling with another question to do with the quest for a permanent home.



This bee is a Melitta harmorrhoidalis – see page 5 for the Bee of the Month.

We are quite clear about our requirements the way things stand at the moment. We have a given number of monthly meetings, winter lectures, microscopy courses, training courses, summer social, AGM, etc. But will the requirements change if we get a permanent base, a place we feel is our home? The question mark is not so critical regarding the number of events but judging the capacity for each correctly, the number of members who want to attend, is not going to be easy.

Our membership has remained quite stable over recent years, at around 250. Attendance at the various meetings is also quite stable though we are always looking to broaden the attraction of monthly meetings, particularly to make them more interesting for intermediate and advanced beekeepers. But obviously, if we succeed in this, we may alter the capacity requirements of the meeting place. Maybe a permanent home would have that effect anyway, or maybe it would just encourage more frequent use by a wider variety of groups, but not larger groups.

These considerations are significant of course because space is at such a premium in London. But whilst it is necessary to try and work out ideal requirements, at the end of the day pragmatic judgements will no doubt prevail. Not least, finding the revenue to meet new overheads.

In the mean time, if any of our members have ideas about how a permanent base might be used now is the time to share your ideas.

Finally, as they say in the advertising industry, if a thing is worth saying it's worth repeating. . . and then saying again: The Lambeth Country Show is on the weekend of the 16/17th of July. Come and visit your LBKA stand. Come and help; come and talk to the public about bees!

Announcements

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

Next Monthly Meeting

Howard will lead the next monthly meeting will be on **Sunday 10th July at 11:00** at **Fairley House Junior School** (220 Lambeth Rd, SE1 7JY) on the subject of **dealing with a vicious stock of bees**. Occasionally bees turn nasty, making beekeeping less pleasant. If this happens, it can be particularly problematic in urban areas because it's more likely that there are others in close proximity. Thankfully, this is rare, but we'll discuss the issues at this meeting and the various options



The venue for July's monthly meeting – the white door on the left.

that are open to us. This and other related topics will be followed by the usual hot drinks, cake and chat.

Summer Social: 14th August

August's Monthly meeting about **feeding bees and feeders** will be followed by our **Summer Social** with a barbecue and drinks. Please put **Sunday 14th August** into your diary! We will also be selling **Apiguard**. More details to follow.

Does anyone have a barbecue that they could lend us?

Extractors

LBKA has 4 extractors which we hire out to members, for a small £5 fee plus £20 deposit (to cover the cost of maintenance and replacement). There are stored in our lock-up at Walworth Garden.

One idea is that we ask volunteers around London to store and take responsibility to lend it out, get it back in time to lend to the next person, collect the £5 fee on behalf of LBKA and manage the £20 deposit returnable if the extractor comes back clean. Email me (services@lbka.org.uk) if you might be able to help with that.

Lambeth Country Show

It's the **42nd Country Show** at **Brockwell Park** on **16th-17th July at 12:00-20:00**. We have a stall there again. It's an event that we all love. There's sheep shearing, a Best in Class sheep competition, jousting, owls, music, food, sheepdog trials and the LBKA! Our stall is in the **Farm Zone** and we have an observation hive there which is always popular with children and adults alike. We also have pollinator friendly seeds to sell, leaflets about bees, competitions, lots of chatting to the public, and members' honey and products of the hive to sell (let us know if you have any you'd like to sell there, although it might be too early in the season for many of us).



Carole Wright in the garden/Guardian. Source: <http://bit.ly/29hNNnC>.

Crowdsourcing Dead Bees

Please bring any dead bees you have to our monthly meeting next Sunday. They'll be used in a photo shoot for Rowse Honey, with one of the images being a hand-bag made entirely of bees.

In order to create the shot, they need over 100 dead bees and have asked for our help. Only bees that have died of natural causes of course! If we all bring a few we should get to the 100+ easily.

Carole featured in the Guardian

Member Carole Wright was featured in the Guardian a couple of weeks ago, talking about London, beekeeping and community projects. Have a read of it here: <http://bit.ly/29hNNnC>.

Old announcements from June

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

WhatsApp: If you'd like to be on one of our WhatsApp groups, contact Aidan on services@lbka.org.uk.

Pesticides: Dave Goulson is raising money to help screen for plants with high neonicotinoids – see <http://bit.ly/25wdu7v> for more information.

Apiary available: St Paul's Way trust school in Poplar are offering space within their school grounds for a competent beekeeper to place 1-2 hives – contact [garylynch@spwt.net](mailto:garyllynch@spwt.net).

Old announcements from May

Assets to LBKA charity: members voted at our EGM to transfer our assets to the new LBKA charity.

Vlad Zamfir: The committee have co-opted Vlad Zamfir (vlad.zamfir@lbka.org.uk) onto the committee. He will help run our Mudchute apiary, web analytics and digital outreach.

Bee waiting list: Our bees/swarm/nucs waiting list is at http://lbka.org.uk/swarm_list.html/. Aidan (services@lbka.org.uk) can add/remove you to/from this. Members can also use this list to offer bees to members.

Tesco Grant: We were awarded £8K by Tesco to help revive the Meadows at Mudchute.

Vicarage apiary site available: Next door to Fulham Palace.

Old announcements from March

Apiaries on offer: The London Fire Brigade are offering Wennington (RM13 9EE), Hornchurch (RM11 1SH), Woodford (IG8 0BS), Park Royal (NW10 7NU), Chiswick (W4 4JY), Biggin Hill (TN16 3UB) and Addington (CR0 0QA) as potential beekeeping sites; contact services@lbka.org.uk for more details.

£2500 donation: Neil's Yard Remedies have donated a further £2500 to LBKA through their "Bee Lovely Campaign" which we will use for our forage creation programme that Mark is running.

Members' area: Logon to the "members-only" section of the website at http://lbka.org.uk/members_area.html to check your details, read minutes and peruse opted-in members (if you are also opted-in).

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.

BBKA Basic Assessments 2016

Howard Nichols
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We have now completed all the Basic Assessments for 2016. A big thank you to our 3 assessors who freely gave of their time to come to our Clapham apiary and assess all candidates during May and June. A total of 15 LBKA members studied and worked towards this assessment. How many were successful? All 15 were successful! Well done to all.

What the assessment involves

The BBKA Basic is both a practical and oral assessment and lasts about 1 hour. Each candidate is asked to assemble a frame, light the smoker (including observing health and safety issues) then open a colony

and demonstrate to the examiner that he or she can control the bees whilst, at the same time, answering a few straightforward questions about the colony contents. After going through the brood frames the candidate reassembles the hive and goes on to the 2nd part of the assessment which is answering a series of straightforward questions about beekeeping, bee biology, swarm control and bee diseases. The syllabus is broad in its range but not particularly deep. The full syllabus is available for download on the BBKA website and within the education section for anyone who is interested. Both the BBKA and the LBKA actively encourage its members to take this assessment and it is recognised as a substantial step forward in beekeeping education. Many allotment committees and other public bodies also now require the beekeeper to have this certificate before they are allowed to keep bees on the establishment's land. The BBKA entry fee is £15 and the LBKA will even refund this to all our successful candidates as a demonstration of our commitment to beekeeper education.

How we all went about it

The process started back in November with potential candidates being given electronic course notes for light winter reading. These notes cover the syllabus from beginning to end. Formal study is not required, just a reading of the course notes at leisure over the winter months. In March and April we then had 3 x 2 hour revision sessions at Walworth Garden Farm and went through the syllabus item by item. Those candidates who wished for some additional practical instruction were also catered for. By the last session we had the assessment dates arranged with the assessors and each candidate was allocated a date and time.

So, on to the actual assessments. These were held over 4 separate days in May and June at our Eden apiary in Clapham, south London. Each day up to 4 candidates were assessed. Richard had done his best to ensure there were sufficient colonies with brood and laying queens to assess all candidates on the 4 occasions. Not an easy task during swarming season.

The 1st session was on Sunday, 1st May. The weather was good, no rain and warm sunshine. Candidates arrived and departed throughout the day; each candidate arriving 1 hour before the allotted time so ensuring the assessor would not be kept waiting if anyone was delayed. The first day commenced at 10.00am and finished about 3.00pm. It was repeated a further 3 times. Despite the diluvian spring and summer we had dry weather for each session.

Meet the assessors

On behalf of the LBKA, I would like to thank all our assessors, In particular, Bob Smith who travelled from Medway, Kent on 2 separate occasions. Peter Bowbrick came from north Surrey and Pat Allen from Essex. All



Bob Smith (left) with Eugene Fahey.

travelled a considerable distance and freely gave of their time and expertise so that all candidates could be assessed. It is greatly appreciated by all of us.

Part of the assessment is to make a frame. Eliot took this to unprecedented heights by bringing in his own pneumatic equipment to do this, part of which is shown in the picture. We mere mortals simply use a hammer and gimp pins!

As previously mentioned, all 15 candidates passed the assessment. A major reason for this success rate is undoubtedly due to the commitment of all candidates. Another significant reason is the LBKA mentoring programme. Each year more experienced members freely give of their time to teach new members the craft of beekeeping. The newer member (mentee) assists the more experienced beekeeper (mentor) over the course of the summer and so starts to learn a variety of skills during the course of a beekeeping season as they meet different situations. This provides a solid foundation to the newer beekeeper. The LBKA would like to thank all its mentors for participating in this invaluable service.

The successful candidates in order in which they took their assessment are: **Vlad Zamfir, Mike True, Julie Bourguignon, Esben Hesketh, John Leiper, Elliot Hodges, Meetal Patel, Tue Sando, Eugene Fahy, Aby Sykes, Dean Forbes, Paul McCarthy, Frank Ryan, Abdul Miah and Vesko Starchikov.**

Finally, anyone who has kept bees for a minimum period of 12 months and wishing to undertake this assessment



Peter Bowbrick (left) with Elliot Hodges (with nail gun).



Melitta leporina

in 2017 can register by giving his or her name and email address to any committee member or by sending an email to education@lbka.org.uk. Further details will be given in an autumn newsletter.

Bee of the month: *Melitta leporina*

Mark's new regular feature will give a tour of different types of non-honeybee.

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

Bee of the Month this month is **Melitta leporina**. There are four species of *Melitta* bee in the UK and all are restricted to the south of England. These bees have a strong association with chalk down land where their preferred pollen sources grow. Their flight period is late June to late August-early September.

Melitta bees nest in underground burrows and are very fussy when it comes to collecting pollen to provision for their offspring.

The **Red Bartsia Bee** (*Melitta tricincta*) collects pollen exclusively from **Red Bartsia** flowers.

The **Sainfoin Bee** (*Melitta dimidiata*) collects pollen exclusively from **Sainfoin**. This is a characteristic which we refer to as being 'monolectic.'

The **Gold Tailed Bee** (*Melitta haemorrhoidalis*) is slightly less fussy about its pollen sources and will collect pollen from most members of the **Bell flower** family (campanula). This bee can be found in the South Western outskirts of London where it will visit **Canterbury Bells** and **Creeping Bell flower** in domestic gardens. I found some very recently in a garden



Pat Allen (right) with Abdul Miah.



The forage planting team.

in Sutton. Its habit of collecting pollen from species of flower which are closely related is referred to as 'oligolectic.'

The least fussy of all the *Melitta* bees is the **Clover Bee** (*Melitta leporina*). This bee has a strong preference for clovers but will also collect pollen from other legumes including **vetches** and **Birds Foot Trefoil**. They will collect nectar from **Wild Marjoram**, **Thyme** and similar flowers.

I recently discovered this bee in Tower Hamlets Cemetery Park. There are around 30 records for this species within the greater London area dating as far back as the 1800s but only a handful of these records were within the last 20 years. The bee was probably much more common in the past but as the urban sprawl of the city has expanded its habitat has been lost.

The bee I found was on artificially created chalk wild-flower meadow created around 20 years ago. The park imported chalk, dolerite and crushed concrete to replicate the chalk down land soils which were then seeded with appropriate species. It's highly likely that the bees have used the adjacent railway sidings as a corridor to move into the area and colonise this part of the city. It goes to show that any bee could appear anywhere at any time so keep your eyes peeled when out in your gardens and local parks.

Mudchute Forage

Mark Patterson
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On Saturday 25th June LBKA held our first forage planting event of the year at Mudchute City Farm and Park.

6 volunteers gathered and between them planted £1000-worth of garden variety plants in the formal gar-



Some forage-planting results.

den outside the farm cafe and one of the WW2 gun batteries.

The plants selected will provide forage for pollinators over a long season and will hopefully be complimented by an interpretation board later in the year.

We will have further planting activities at Mudchute in the autumn.

June's monthly meeting: Bee Health

What happened at last month's meeting.

Martin Hudson
LBKA member

The planned all-day 'Bee Health Day' to replace the monthly meeting in June had to be curtailed because of local authority health and safety concerns about the number of people expected on the roof apiary in Holland Park, and instead the session was more like the usual monthly meeting format, with Howard Nichols and Richard Glassborow doing their brilliant double-act to remind both new recruits and existing beekeepers of the importance of recognising bee diseases.

As it happened, the weather was in no way conducive to inspection of bees, being damp, drizzly and cold, but the Ecology Centre in Holland Park, where the monthly meeting was held for the first time, is a lovely venue, set in what looks a bit like tropical rainforest (along with the resident peacocks and rain!), set only a mile or so from Notting Hill!

About thirty people attended, many of them new faces, and Howard opened the morning with a slightly truncated 'Bee Diseases Quiz' which he knew I had tried before - but to my shame I got no better score than the last time - emphasizing the importance of repeated training. He drummed in the message that we should inspect at least twice a year with the sole intention of looking for diseased brood, and not get distracted by looking for signs of swarming, queen cells, etc. He emphasized the cardinal rule - that we should at least know what healthy brood looks like - so that we can identify when something is not quite right, and seek help if need be!

Richard then showed us some rather manky frames which he had taken from the Holland Park apiary hives a few weeks earlier, which demonstrated some of the diseases highlighted earlier by Howard's quiz. He reminded us of the importance of identifying the notifiable brood diseases (AFB and EFB - I explained these acronyms to a couple who had just taken over a hive at a Ladbroke Grove school, but did not know their meaning - but they were taking copious notes!).

It was a shame that there was not enough time to discuss the varroa mite and the effect this has on colonies. A choice had to be made between AFB/EFB and varroa, which is so much more prevalent than the notifiable diseases, but with the time available, it was necessary to make this choice. I look forward to an opportunity to visit the bees in the Holland Park apiary - preferably in better weather - in the future!

July in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
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July beekeeping work has 2 distinct parts. These are dealing with the early July nectar flow then, at the end of the month, removal of honey.

During May and June there is relatively little nectar flow and the bees utilise this period to build up colony numbers rather than to swarm. There is now a lot less inclination to swarm and the bees direct their attention towards capturing the flowing nectar from the summer flowers.

Nectar flow

The exact timing of the nectar flow depends upon weather and locality but is usually late June and July in London. Rain does wash secreted nectar from the flowers but, hopefully, we will start to have some better weather.

How do I know when it has started?

There are at least 2 ways. The first is to keep in contact with other local beekeepers and association members. This is an advantage in joining an association - you become part of a pool of knowledge and experience. The second is to watch the colony entrance. The coming and going becomes a lot more purposeful when the nectar flow starts, bees leave the hive entrance in a determined and focussed way. They have the appearance of knowing exactly what they are doing and where they are going. As the nectar flow progresses then, of course, the supers also become heavier but, by this time, the flow is well underway.

Adding supers

Regular inspections are still needed but the beekeeper's attention should now be directed towards checking there is enough room in the supers. A cursory glance in the top super should be sufficient. When the frames in the top super are covered with bees then it is time to add another. Many beekeepers move the frames around a little by putting a few combs of honey and nectar into the newly added top super as this encourages bees to continue onwards and upwards. The nectar flow can also be used to draw out new combs from foundation.

Removing honey from the hive

A comb of honey should only be removed when it is at least 75% sealed by the bees. This is to avoid fermentation of the final product. There are several methods of clearing the bees from the supers. These can be grouped into physical methods (bee escapes, etc), chemical methods (repellents available for purchase from bee equipment suppliers) and mechanical methods (blowers which blow the bees off the frames). Some beekeepers have concerns relating to the use of chemicals and mechanical methods are more akin to commercial beekeeping, not hobbyists. It is only the physical methods detailed here. The 2 most common physical methods are Porter bee escapes and shaking the bees off the frames.

Porter bee escapes

Most of us use Porter bee escapes incorporated into a clearing board. These work well provided they are used properly and the metal escapes are clean and not stuck with propolis. After about 48 hours most of the bees have gone down through the valve and there are relatively few bees in the super. Better to use a crownboard with 2 bee escapes. If 1 malfunctions then the other is still in use.

Make sure there is plenty of space for the bees below the supers. If necessary then insert another empty super with frames below to house the bees. Ensure the bees cannot come back up into the supers being cleared. Ill-fitting, none bee spaced equipment or defective Porter bee escapes are the usual reasons for failure.

Shake and brush

Another method is shaking the individual frames to remove as many bees as possible then brushing off the remainder. An extra super is needed to hold the shaken frames and this should be placed on the upturned hive roof and covered with a sheet or large cloth.

This method causes a certain amount of disturbance to the bees and may not be suitable for a hive in close proximity to people. Its advantage is that it is quick and only involves 1 visit to the apiary.

Other action to be taken this month

Once the nectar flow starts then most colonies abandon the idea of swarming as it is now not in their interests to do so. There is still a small risk of swarming and this is increased if the bees do not have enough room to store nectar. Another reason to ensure that enough supers are on the hive.

The nectar flow is a golden opportunity to undertake a brood disease inspection. As the bees are so busy with



Privet

the nectar. Leaving the brood disease inspection to autumn may leave insufficient time to take corrective action. Optimum times for a specific brood disease inspection are early spring and in summer whilst the nectar flow is in progress.

Reduce colony entrances when the nectar flow ceases.

Plan your varroa treatment for next month. Decide your strategy and buy any supplies you will need.

Reserve your use of an extractor next month if you usually hire LBKA equipment.

Come along to our monthly meeting on Sunday, 10th July. We will be discussing how to deal with a vicious colony of bees.

Focus on Forage

Mark's regular update on what is in flower that bees like.

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

June has been a difficult month this season with some beekeepers reporting that it's been their worst June in a decade. Long spells of torrential rain have held bees



Bird's Foot Trefoil



Lime blossom

prisoners within their hives for days at a time, forcing them to consume honey stores gained in May. Many beekeepers have had to feed this June to stave off starvation.

Weaker colonies including splits with limited stores are most at risk of starvation. Sadly not all Beekeepers recognise starvation when it's staring back at them. Remain vigilant and check stores weekly especially if the weather is wet, feed if necessary.

Fortunately for myself my own bees were able to put away a super or 2 during May so I have not had to feed but it does mean I have lost much of my spring honey harvest.

As we pass from June into July, all our hopes for a decent harvest now rely upon the **Lime** trees. Limes are blooming. There are 3 species of limes native to the UK: Large Leaved Lime (*Tilia platyphyllos*), Small Leaved Lime (*Tilia cordata*) and a naturally occurring hybrid of the before mentioned two (*Tilia × europaea*). The small leaved Lime is common throughout England but in the south west it is largely replaced by the large leaved lime which thrives better on the lime-rich soils.

Be aware of the Silver Lime (*Tilia tormentosa*) which is an exotic introduction and flowers a bit later than our

native limes. Its nectar is toxic to bees and when there is a dearth in forage the bees may mistakenly collect its nectar and in the process become intoxicated before falling comatose beneath the tree.

Limes are capable of producing copious volumes of nectar but only if the weather conditions are just right. High soil moisture content from spring rains followed by very warm sultry weather is needed to trigger a good Lime flow.

Lime honey is highly sought after as it has a minty aftertaste and tangy tone to it. It's also high in fructose sugars and low in glucose meaning it stays liquid for a long time and resists crystallisation prolonging its shelf life and makes an attractive looking jar of honey for the sales stall.

We are fortunate in urban areas to have an abundance of lime trees growing in our parks and street sides. In London limes represent our biggest potential for a bumper honey crop but as mentioned earlier this only becomes a reality when the weather conditions come together at the right time. With all the heavy rain in June there's the potential for a fantastic lime flow this season as long as the weather remains hot and sunny. During a strong lime flow a healthy colony of honey bees can fill a super in a matter of days so it's important you have spare boxes at the ready.

Other plants which are important for our bees this month include **bramble** which should now be in peak flower. Like lime nectar, bramble is mostly fructose which leads to a light fruity honey which seldom crystallises. I am lucky that all my apiaries are bordering over ground railway lines which have an abundance of bramble growing along the sidings.

Around water and damp ground **Himalayan Balsam** is now flowering and will continue to do so right up until late August. Balsam is loved by many Beekeepers for its flowers provide forage in bulk at a time when there is often little else around. It's a contentious plant though, being a non-native plant and highly invasive. It's listed under schedule 9 of the wildlife and countryside Act 1981 as illegal to plant, knowing aid or allow to spread. The penalty if found guilty can exceed a £5000 fine and a criminal record. So please beware of those beekeepers on Internet forums advocating its spread as a plant good for bees! Far better plants suited to damp ground include Water Mint, Purple Loosestrife and Hemp Agrimony which are all loved by bees.

Other good sources of forage joining the summer flow this month include **Tree of Heaven** (*Ailanthus altissima*), **Indian Chestnut** (*Aesculus indica*), **Chinese Privet tree** (*Ligustrum sinense*) and **Indian bean tree** (*Catalpa Bignoniodes*). All are abundant in urban parks and provide pollen and nectar after all our native trees have ceased flowering. Last year one of our members in north London had their honey analysed by a forensics lab and most of the pollen was from Tree of Heaven.

In urban areas shrubs including **Choisya**, **Cotoneaster**, **Privet**, **Philadelphus**, **Escalonia**, **Abelia**, **Santolina** and **Hebe** will continue to attract bees.

Elder is just coming to an end along with **Dog Rose** meaning few native shrubs continue to flower into July.

As July progresses our bees become more and more reliant on ground level flora for their forage. Wildflowers like **Bugloss**, **Birds Foot Trefoil**, **Vetches**, **Knapweeds**, **Thistle**, **wild Thyme**, **wild Marjoram**, **Scabious**, **Teasel** and **Umbellifers**. Plants which many of us associate as 'weeds' and try our best to eradicate are often plants important to bees in high summer – among them **Ragwort**.

July and August are the months of the year when most Beekeepers remove their honey harvest but it is also the time of year when our honey bees are flying the furthest to find profitable flower patches. Research undertaken at Sussex University has shown that during July and August Honey Bees are regularly flying as far as 12 km away to forage and their decoded waggle dances indicated that the bees were making a bee line for nearby towns and villages where they can find abundant blooms in our domestic gardens.

We can all help make life a little easier for the bees in late summer by making better plant selections in our gardens. You can find planting suggestions on my website <http://www.apicultural.co.uk/> along with some good suggestions for plants suitable for balconies and window boxes.

The facts about honey bee declines

This represents LBKA's position on honey bee declines, available at http://lbka.org.uk/downloads/lbka_bee-declines.pdf

Mark Patterson and the LBKA committee

For several years now there has been a great deal of concern about the future and survival of managed honey bee stocks and the effects declining bee populations will have on pollination and global food production. More than a third of all the food we eat and most of the highly nutritional foodstuffs in our diets are reliant on bees and other beneficial insects for pollination.

High profile awareness campaigns by the likes of the Soil Association, Greenpeace, PAN, the BBKA and Friends of the Earth have greatly increased the profile of the honey bee within mainstream media resulting in a much

higher awareness that honey bees are in decline and according to some even considered threatened or endangered. Phenomena like Colony Collapse Disorder (CCD) have wiped out large numbers of colonies in North America and these losses have been widely publicised. Much of the blame for bee losses including those to CCD have been directed at pesticides, specifically a class of systemic pesticides called Neonicotinoids which have now been temporarily banned from use within the EU, pending further testing. Academics are still divided as to the degree with which neonics are responsible for bee losses, but overall conclusions are that – while they are harmful to bees (bumble bees and solitary bees especially) – they are not the primary cause for losses of managed honey bees¹.

Factors which are likely to have contributed to colony collapse in the US, but may explain why the phenomena is absent in Europe, are the differences in commercial apiculture in the US including moving colonies over vast distances to meet demands for pollination services. The animated infographic at <http://ngm.nationalgeographic.com/2015/05/building-bees/transport-map>, illustrates US commercial honey bee movements.

Movements on this scale combined with limited forage availability and nutritional intake restricted to one monoculture crop after another are thought to cause distress and weaken colonies making them more susceptible to other stressors such as pesticide exposure and pathogens.

Other arguably more important factors implicated with bee decline have been largely ignored and left unaddressed until very recently, despite most leading scientists agreeing that pesticides are not the main cause. Habitat loss, invading exotic pests as well as pathogens and bad husbandry practices are far more critical threats according to most academics, like Prof Francis Ratnieks of the University of Sussex Laboratory for Apiculture and Social Insects (LASI).

Winter Losses

Each year the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) and The National Bee Unit (a government agency) publish results from their 2 separate surveys of winter losses. These surveys highlight winter losses and attempt to understand the causes behind them. Often this is simply down to poor weather. (2014/15 winter losses stand at 16%) Both organisations deem losses greater than 10% to be unacceptable whilst some academics believe this to be well within acceptable losses. In the US reports of average winter losses among American hives of 41% have driven home the message that honey bees are in decline leading to sensationalist articles portraying honey bees heading for extinction.

¹http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v521/n7552_suppl/full/52152a.html

These figures when released each year are quickly interpreted by the mainstream press as evidence for extreme declines and portray an image that honey bees are continuing to fare poorly and are endangered. The truth is losses of the nature experienced across Europe are not that alarming and are easily replaced in good summers.

What these reports do not take into consideration is that each year the remaining colonies – whether they be wild or managed – will likely swarm and multiply or be split intentionally by the beekeeper, increasing colony numbers to replenish any lost stocks. In good years with ideal weather conditions numbers of managed colonies can increase substantially.

There are now a number of joined-up long term studies being carried out by leading bee scientists around the world investigating colony losses and fluctuations in managed colony numbers. Recent reports from these studies are countering the perception that honey bees are in rapid decline and endangered. Studies in Europe include the COLOSS Partnership, Epilobee and in the US the Bee Informed Partnership. The International Bee Research Association is studying bee populations on a global scale.

Data from these organisations and their studies suggests that despite bad winter losses in some regions in some years, honey bee numbers are actually on the increase and conclude that concern about the decline of the honey bee is misplaced, or even bogus. **However, many species of bumble and solitary bees are under threat.**

A study by Breeze *et al* published January 2014 in the peer-reviewed journal Plos One has pointed to European honey bee stocks increasing by 7% between 2005 and 2010 and points out that the apparent pollination crisis stems from our increased demand on pollinators for pollinating biofuel crops and increasing demands to produce more food for a growing population rather than pollinators declining. Other sources indicate that global stocks are up significantly, largely due to increasing numbers of beekeepers and managed hives in countries like China stepping up their honey production. Numbers of amateur beekeepers across the western world are also on the increase. More people are taking to beekeeping as a means of reconnecting with nature in urban environments and because they want to help the honey bee. In the UK members of the BBKA have soared from 8,463 members in 2003 to over 25,500 members in 2015. National Bee Unit data shows that nationally, managed colony numbers have increased to 147,500 hives in England and its islands (excluding Ireland, Wales and Scotland). Numbers of beekeepers in London have more than doubled since 2008 whilst colony numbers have more than tripled to over 5000 managed colonies according to Bee Base, a government register of beekeepers and their apiaries.

It is the position of the LBKA that honey bees are no longer in 'grave danger', are currently enjoying a

period of revival and do not need saving, but rather that they do need our help and assistance. We also feel that sensational media hype about their demise is unhelpful and distracting from the real issues such as forage availability, prevention of establishment of new invasive pests and pathogens, the need for training and improved husbandry and the declines in wild bees which are under more serious threat.

Whilst not in immediate danger, honey bees and their keepers do face challenging times ahead with varroa destructor becoming increasingly resistant to synthetic chemical treatments and the threat of small hive beetle, asian hornet and numerous exotic pathogens arriving in the UK. Climate change may also bring challenges for our bees, however the honey bee is found throughout the world in a wide variety of habitats and ecozones and its genome contains a great deal of genetic diversity which will ensure its survival. Most of these threats can be successfully managed through appropriate integrated pest management prescriptions and vigilance of beekeepers and do not necessarily spell doom and gloom for our managed honey bees.

Unmanaged or feral honey bees without beekeepers to tend to them face a more uncertain future. Many wild or feral colonies are short-lived, succumbing to high varroa infestation. There is some evidence that some isolated honey bee populations are showing resistance to varroa, but it will take many years and many more generations for the entire species to develop resistance to varroa at a species level.

Our attention instead needs to be focussed on declines of other pollinators including solitary bees and bumble bees. Of the insect pollinators which pollinate crops across Europe, solitary and bumble bees play an important role, and are responsible for a considerable portion of insect-pollinated crops. They are relied upon to pollinate many crops which the honey bee cannot pollinate successfully, or they work in synergy alongside managed honey bees to improve pollination yields, fruit development and marketability of the finished crop. Examples include Solanums like Tomato and Aubergine which can only be pollinated by bumble bees and field beans which are heavily reliant on solitary species for pollination. According to a recent report by the International Union for Nature Conservation (IUCN), 9% of Europe's 2000 species of wild bee are seriously under threat with several facing imminent extinction unless actions are taken to safeguard their fragile populations. According to the Bees, Wasps and Ants Recording Society (BWARS) a further 30% of Europe's wild bees lack sufficient data on population size and distribution to be able to assess their vulnerability. It is these unsung heroes (which work in synergy with honey bees to ensure pollination of our crops) that most deserve our attention and which are most in need of our help.

Many people sympathise with the plight of insect pollinators and are keen to help. Our message is that everyone can be a beekeeper whether keeping a hive of honey bees or not. The easiest way that everyone can help

our struggling pollinators is to plant more flowers for them. Improved forage for all bees will mean healthier bee populations able to forage on a nutritionally diverse floral resource, improved pollination of crops, improved food security and improvements to honey yields.

Facebook (In)digest(ion)

Natalie Cotton
LBKA Member

Here's a selection from the very busy LBKA facebook group and twitter feed, for those who prefer their information in a more traditional way!

Our forage officer Mark shared some wonderful pictures of East End Homes' Mile End project to re-green its estates, first reported on last year, as well as an album of action shots from the Mudchute apiary forage planting day. Mark also took us all on a guided tour of Tower Hamlets cemetery, and spotted his first ever *Melitta leporine*, usually only found on chalk grassland. His photos are reason enough to take up Facebook, for anyone currently reluctant!

If that's made you long for your own day out, then The Hive at Kew Garden (<http://www.kew.org/visit-kew-gardens/explore/attractions/hive>) comes highly recommended by Twitter users.

Bees contribute more to the economy than the royal family, according to the Daily Telegraph article shared by Michael Taylor: <http://bit.ly/1IOsB0S> Bees also made the BBC News (but all the jokes have surely been done already!), this time wearing 'licence plates' as part of an experiment to track their favourite London places: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-london-36578310?SThisFB> – thanks to Raymond Lancashire for posting. And member Carol Wright was the subject of The Guardian's gardening magazine feature on 25 June, talking about how her love of gardening led to her love of bees: <http://bit.ly/29hNNnC>, with beautiful pictures of her Waterloo site.

Angela Woods let us know that the New Scientist is giving away eight beek appropriate books on 'getting back to nature', which could come in handy in a wet summer: <http://bit.ly/29BbKai>

Wimbledon Bee Keepers Association issued a warning that they'd been victims of a break in. If anyone sees Wimbledon-labelled jars being sold anywhere other than at shows, please contact the Association.

Have you voted in the Urban Food Awards? Several members, including Bee Naturals (Paul

Vagg) and Hen Corner (Sara Ward) are short-listed in the 'Heavenly Honey' category. Good luck to all! http://www.sustainweb.org/resources/files/other_docs/ufa_produce_honey.pdf

For those feeling foody at home, the twitter feed posted a mouthwatering picture of an ice cream cone with a slab of honeycomb rather than a flake. Pics of your own honey based creations are encouraged.

And finally, no social media feed was free from Brexit, with @LondonBeeKeeper reminding us that Britain voting to leave may be half a million pounds less funding a year for our National Bee Unit which helps Beekeepers keep their bees disease free :(

Adventures in Beeland: Leaving the EU: what does it mean for British bees and beekeepers?

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

Emily Scott
LBKA member

It was a shock to find out yesterday that Britain had voted to leave the EU. Until the first poll results started coming in I had hoped that, as with the Scottish referendum, the remainers would win out in the end. But then I live in London and we tend to vote differently to the rest of England.

While most of my friends were left as gloomy, worried and angry as I was by the result, reactions were more mixed on the British Beekeepers Association (BBKA) Facebook group. Beekeepers involved in bee research or working for the National Bee Unit (NBU) are concerned. The NBU currently receives half a million in funding annually from the EU for the UK apiculture program – see the funding tables for EU member states in 2014-16. This funding helps pay for our excellent bee inspectors, who carry out apiary inspections, provide technical assistance to beekeepers and work to prevent bee pests and diseases spreading.

Those who voted to leave are of course optimistic about how the result will affect beekeepers. They argue that there will now be more money to go round and that now the government has the freedom to ban imports of bees, which could help with disease control and pro-



A NBU inspector's bee suit. Courtesy The Food and Environment Research Agency (Fera), Crown Copyright.



A NBU training session for London beekeepers.

mote local gene pools. My answer to that would be that I can't see a Conservative government – or any government – ploughing funds into supporting beekeepers or prioritising banning bee imports. We'll be lucky if they don't spend the extra cash on privatising national forests, eliminating the green belt and building some beautiful duck houses.

Some have lovely ideas that BBKA members should club together and fund the NBU funding shortfall. I'm sure some of us wouldn't mind chipping in, but bear in mind that even putting up subscription fees by a pound annually causes much debate at the BBKA Annual Delegates Meetings. Us beekeepers are known for being stingy buggers money savvy. If the bee inspectors could be persuaded to take payment in honey and home brewed mead that might do it.

Here are a couple of posts written before the referendum on how the EU supports environmental policies:

- The environmental argument for the UK remaining in the European Union – by Jeff Ollerton, Professor of Biodiversity in the Department of Environmental and Geographical Sciences at the University of Northampton. One of those "experts" the leave campaign scoffed at. He makes the point that environmental issues cross borders, so work-

ing together in coordination with other countries is beneficial for wildlife.

- Vote Remain for Nature and the Environment – by David Craven, a geologist who works in natural sciences and environmental sustainability. David reminds us that the Farming Minister, George Eustice, said "The birds and habitats directives will go" just three weeks ago. These pesky, "spirit-crushing" bits of red tape do unimportant things like protecting our native birds and habitats.

None of us knows for sure what is coming next, but whatever happens I hope British beekeepers will fight together to protect services for beekeepers and flowers for bees.

Upcoming events

Saturday, 9th July: Breeding and using hygienic bees

13:00-17:00 at Laboratory of Apiculture and Social Insects, University of Sussex, Falmer.

This workshop is run by LASI in Sussex, please see their web page for more details and how to book – <http://www.sussex.ac.uk/lasi/newsandevents/events?id=34717>.

Sunday 10th July: Monthly meeting: Dealing with a vicious stock of bees

11:00-13:00 at Fairley House Junior School, 220 Lambeth Rd, London SE1 7JY

Occasionally bees turn nasty, making beekeeping less pleasant. If this happens, it can be particularly problematic in urban areas because it's more likely that there are others in close proximity. Thankfully, this is rare, but we'll discuss the issues at this meeting and the various options that are open to us. This and other related topics will be followed by the usual hot drinks, cake and chat. Meetings are for members only, but you're welcome to come as a guest to find out more about our association.

Saturday 16th and Sunday 17th July: Lambeth Country Show

12:00-20:00 at Brockwell Park, Dulwich Rd, London SE24 0PA.

Come to our annual stall at this long-running annual event! There'll be all sorts of things going on. We'll

be educating the public, showing bees, wax-rolling and selling products of the hive.

Sunday 14th August: Monthly meeting: Feeding bees and Summer Social

11:00-16:00 at Walworth Garden, 206 Braganza St, London SE17 3BN.

All you ever needed to know about feeding bees and different types of feeder. This will be followed by our famous Summer Social. Members and their guests only.

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:** Aidan Slingsby, services@lbka.org.uk
- **Forage:** Mark Patterson, forage@lbka.org.uk
- **Events:** Emily Abbott, events@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Tristram Sutton, mentoring@lbka.org.uk
- **Vlad:** Vlad Zamfir, vlad.zamfir@lbka.org.uk

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

