



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

August, 2016

Welcome to this month's newsletter! Eugene reports on his experiences doing the BBKA Bee Basic assessment and Geoff does the same for the General Husbandry certificate. Sue reports that her 'scientific' plans have not quite gone to plan. Jon recounts our successful Lambeth Country Show stand and Emily tells us about The Hive exhibit at Kew. In terms of regular contributions, unfortunately Mark has not been able to provide his contribution this month (he needs approval from his employer which isn't always quick enough). . . but Natalie reminds us what happened at last month's meeting, Howard tells us what we need to be doing at this time of year and Richard gives us an update on LBKA's apiaries. Thanks also for Martin for proof-reading this edition (and for providing the first Reader's letter!)

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A big thank you to all this month's contributors: **Natalie Cotton, Eugene Fahy, Richard Glassborow, Jon Harris, Geoff Hood, Martin Hudson, Sue Lee, Howard Nichols and Emily Scott.**

Please contact me if you would be willing to contribute to next month's newsletter.

Aidan Slingsby
Editor
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From our Chair

Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk

July finally presented us with some summer. Not before time and especially welcome for the Lambeth Country Show which should by right only be held in glorious sunshine. Would it were always so but this year it certainly was. A full report appears elsewhere in the News Letter but I would like to take the opportunity here of thanking and congratulating the organisers and volunteers. Emily, our Events officer, was sadly unable to attend this year's show but she did make sure that others were there to organise it and recruited and organised a veritable army of volunteers to look after the stall, talk endlessly about bees to the public and sell honey, seeds and other products of the hive. I must also name Angela Woods and Jon Harris for volunteering to take on the rest of the organisation and Emma Nye and David Hankins for making sure all the paperwork was completed correctly for the Event organisers and Lambeth Council (not straightforward!). Then of course there are all the members who turned up to help on the day, and there were a lot of you. I have to say the LBKA stand looked and felt great. Thank you all.



Bees completing a super of capped honey.

We are intending to roll out again for the Harvest Stomp in Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park on, I think, 25th September. It is not as big as the Lambeth Show but more intimate and I hope, if you enjoyed Lambeth, you will consider helping again, or, if you weren't at Lambeth but feel encouraged by reports, you may feel inspired to help for the first time. Harvest Stomp is also a good place to sell honey.

I have heard it said that beekeepers all end up becoming amateur meteorologists. It is hardly surprising, given how flowers and bees are entirely affected by prevailing weather conditions. This year, the cool, wet spring delayed both flowering plants and the build-up of many honeybee colonies and the effects are still being felt. This late "season" also intensifies a dilemma I have always felt but never resolved over the timing of Apiguard treatment for varroa.

Traditionally in the UK the honey harvest is taken at the end of July, partly because the main harvest is over but also because Apiguard requires a minimum ambient temperature of 15°C but it cannot be applied while supers are being filled with honey. I have never understood the ambient temperature argument because the brood nest is at 35°C anyway, so I would have expected the whole box to be at least 15°C well into September. In addition, London has a micro-climate warmer than many parts of the country and, anecdotally at least, a longer flowering season because of wider variety and better succession. So, how to resolve? Bees are still bringing in nectar (and may continue to do so for a while yet), you want to put wet extracted supers back on for cleaning but you also want to treat with Apiguard for four weeks. You may also have a colony with high levels of varroa! Discuss.

Martin has started the discussion in our very first reader's letter on page 16 – take a look.

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 – with summer social!

It's summer... so it's time for our annual summer social!

We'll be at **Walworth Garden** (206 Braganza St, London, SE17 3BN) this month – rather than our usual venue – on **14th August** from **11:00**. This used to be our meeting place before we outgrew the meeting room and it has been the venue of our last few sum-



Walworth Garden (on a wet day) – the venue for this month's meeting and social.

mer socials. I hope the photograph (from their website) isn't an omen for wet weather like we had last year... however there was plenty of inside space.

The meeting component of the meeting will be about feeders and feeding bees. Particularly after taking a honey crop – even if you leave each colony a super each – feeding your colonies provides essential stores for the winter and spring. We will also have Apiguard for sale (at cost price) for treating colonies for Varroa.

The social component will be lubricated by fantastic food provided and served by the Chickpea Sisters (<http://www.chickpeasisters.com/>) and both alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks. The Chickpea Sisters are a group of refugee and migrant women living in South-West London, who meet every week to chat, eat, and share recipes from around the world. They share their culinary delights with the local community, catering for a large range of events... including ours this year.

This is a free event for all members. Members are welcome to bring a couple of guests, but please let us know how many of you are coming to help us plan the catering. Email David on treasurer@lbka.org.uk.

September's monthly meeting will be on 11th September about uniting colonies.

Extractors

We have extractors that we hire out to members, for a small £5 fee plus £20 deposit (to cover the cost of maintenance and replacement) for up to 3-days. There are stored in our lock-up at Walworth Garden.

Please email David (treasurer@lbka.org.uk) or Tristram (mentoring@lbka.org.uk) if you'd like to book one. Sue

Lee has also kindly offered to store and hire out one of our extractors – her email address is in the email that accompanied this newsletter.

Bees

For anyone with bees to sell, http://lbka.org.uk/swarm_list.html has a list of members looking for bees.

Old announcements from July

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

Congratulations to **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** for passing their BBKA Bee Basic exams. Also, a big thank you to Howard Nichols for helping them get through the exams as he has done excellently for many years.

Old announcements from June

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 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.

July's monthly meeting: Dealing with an aggressive stock of bees

What happened at last month's meeting.

The Committee tries its best to reflect members' wishes and aspirations on beekeeping matters. If you would like a particular beekeeping subject to be the topic for discussion at a monthly meeting in 2017 please ask a committee member.

Natalie Cotton
LBKA member

I keep my two hives in my tiny back yard, so they're in extremely close proximity to my own home and to the other hundred odd flats in my block. As a result, I feel a great responsibility to make sure that my bees don't become nuisance neighbours. So knowing what to do in the event of a colony turning aggressive is key. July's monthly meeting, presented by Howard, gave practical advice and an opportunity for attendees to discuss their experiences.

Howard began the talk by running through some more commonly encountered scenarios that can prompt a usually calm colony to appear angry:

- The summer nectar flow can cause bees to seem more purposeful – they're not being aggressive, they're getting on with the important business of building up stores
- A colony being robbed will be more aggressive as it's having to defend itself
- Drones trapped above the queen excluder can cause an entire colony to change behaviour – Howard pointed out that we know relatively little about the social function of the drone within the colony. They might not only have the one job, as we tend to assume.
- Disturbing the colony, through moving or accidentally knocking

However, a very small number of colonies are simply extremely aggressive bees.

These need to be dealt with if there is any chance of members of the public coming in to contact with them.

As beekeepers, there's no avoiding having to get up close and personal if it's one of our own hives. Howard gave advice on how to set about tackling this:

- Keep other people well away from the site.
- Wear the appropriate protective clothing. This might mean more than just your usual bee suit – think thick clothes underneath and extra gloves. And, consider gaffa taping your wellies!
- Have antihistamines and other medical treatment close to hand, including an epi-pen if you are prescribed one.

Requeening – when practical

The 'simplest' method for righting an aggressive colony, espoused in most books, is to requeen with a mated queen known to be from calmer stock. About six weeks after requeening, the bees should all be offspring of the new queen, and share their mother's sunny disposition.

Personally, I could see an obvious flaw with that method for less experienced beekeepers. Finding a queen in a calm colony is hard enough as a beginner, without complicating matters with attacking bees! Howard reassured the meeting that even experienced keepers can be phased by the task, and that there was a solution, heavily paraphrased below (and apologies to Howard if his advice is lost in translation).

Separating the flying bees

Requeening is far simpler if the aggressive, attacking bees are separated from the brood. Bees begin stinging about seventeen days in to their lifecycle when they start foraging, so this means removing the flying bees.

Assuming you've room in the apiary, this can be achieved by moving the aggressive hive at least six feet

away from its usual position. Put a hive floor with a brood box and frames (if you have one) or super with frames in the original place. You'll need to wait about three hours, but the flying bees will naturally return to the original hive site.

You'll be left with an easier to handle hive, and will have had plenty of time to steel your nerves for opening up the brood box and removing the aggressive queen. She can be most humanely disposed of by placing in the freezer.

After a few hours, add your new queen to the brood box in a queen cage.

Unfortunately, there remains the task of recombining the flying bees with the brood, on the original site. As they are bees from the same hive newspaper isn't required – but don't be tempted to think that the flying bees aren't either and the two halves can be left separate. This would unbalance the hive and leave you with a brood box unable to forage.

When six weeks is too long to wait

For those of us who keep our bees close to members of the public, six weeks with the risk of aggressive bees stinging passers by is not a realistic option. Howard discussed two other solutions with the group: moving the hive and destroying the hive.

Destroying the hive seems extreme, but on very rare occasions is the only sensible option. The recommended method is to use petrol – the fumes will kill the bees almost instantaneously if the entrances are blocked. Martin and Angie shared his experiences of having to do this with a particularly unpleasant colony (described by Angela Woods as the most vicious she'd ever dealt with!) and confirmed that the method works.

Moving a hive

For beekeepers with a large apiary or alternative site, moving an aggressive hive somewhere they can't bother the neighbours can provide an opportunity to safely requeen. Howard ran through some of the tips for moving hives (this might be considered a topic in itself, which demonstrates just how valuable LBKA meetings are for expanding your beekeeping knowledge).

The main piece of advice I took away when moving an aggressive colony is that a trailer is extremely useful. Nobody wants to find bad tempered bees escaping in to their car. Richard also reported receiving a call from TfL, who reported 'irresponsible' use of buses for bee transportation!

Plenty of practical advice and shared experiences have given me, and hopefully other beekeepers, the confidence to know how to tackle this issue if it arises. I've added gaffa tape to my beekeeping box just in case.



Kate Bush "lookalikes". Source: <http://bit.ly/2aNWGGN>



Lambeth Country Show. Source: <http://bit.ly/2aLyGmo>.



Classic Country Show. Source: <http://bit.ly/2aNVYJF>



Political vegetable sculptures. Source: <http://bit.ly/2aOWmbb>

Lambeth Country Show

Last month saw our annual presence at the Lambeth Country Show at which we talk to the public about bees, show the bees from our observation hive and sell seeds and honey. Thanks to Emily for organising the volunteers, Angela and Jon for being in charge on the day and all the LBKA volunteers: Sayma Chowdhury, Callie Nell, Zaffrin O'Sullivan, Claire Diver, Martin Hudson, Petros Hahladakis, Jonathan Richards, Sheena Rogers, Matthew Casbourne, Danyal Conn, Carole Wright, Mary Walwyn, Mark Patterson, Roger Jeffs, Natalie Cotton, Paul Vagg, Dominique Bernard, Anya Ingateva and anyone else I've forgotten.

Also thanks to BeeGood (<https://beegood.co.uk/>) for donating beauty products for our raffle. The prize was won by Katie Spear.

Jon Harris
LBKA member

It was that time of year again, and a small band of beekeepers assembled in Brockwell Park at the crack of dawn on a very hot and sunny Saturday morning to set up the LBKA stand at the Lambeth Country Show. By 11am we were all set up and ready to go. As we sat watching all the latecomers set up we all tucked in to hearty bacon and egg rolls. Then Angela and Callie

ensured we all had our sun block on as by 10am the temperatures were soaring to 25°C.

The official figures say that there were about 200,000 people attending over the Saturday and Sunday – a record for the show, beating last year by over 10%. The show was a complete mix, from sheep, cows and ducks to local artists, food and drink. The entertainment was also a complete mix to represent the borough, from reggae DJs to school choirs and 200 people dressed in red dresses (male and female) re-enacting Wuthering Heights from Kate Bush.

The show had also spread across more of the park and I feel this was a great success as it allowed the record numbers to move around more freely

We were one of 3 bee related stands in the farm zone, and we were all extremely busy across both days. We focussed on bee information and pollinator information for bees and other pollinators. We also managed to sell a huge amount of honey for members and the association. The observation hive also generated a lot of interest for the young and more mature alike. We even had the leader of Lambeth Council spend a lot of time on the stand with her family and friends (Richard and I also took this opportunity to discuss the possibility of Lambeth finding us a permanent home in the borough, not sure how fruitful this will be given the cuts in their funding from central government...)

We also managed to sell 100s of packets of pollinator seeds, so we are hoping for a great rise in forage for the

bees next year. Lots of people committed to planting in window boxes and around trees in streets as well as gardens. People were also very interested in what other plants they could plant and anything else they could do to help support the bees, so lets hope for an increase in bug hotels and people not using pesticides and herbicides in their gardens, which is a great result for the city pollinators.

The star of our show was, like always, the observation hive, many thanks to all the bees that made this possible. We also had a roaring trade in candle rolling, which the kids and adults loved.

There is always so much to see at the show, it is a great day out for all of the family, from the vegetable carving (this year was politicians, which was amazing) to sheep shows, cake making, to yoga workshops and over 200 people dressed as Kate Bush in red dresses (did I already mention that?) It was a really eclectic but fun mix!

On the whole I think that the show was a great success for the LBKA and a really good and fun day for all those that came to help out throughout the 2 days, like always, it as hard work but well worth it for the very positive reaction we had from all of the public that visited our stand. It was also nice for all the bee related stands to work together to promote bees and pollinators, many thanks to Bee Conscious and Bee Urban for their help and support.

The biggest thank you has to go to all that turned up to help support the LBKA, we had experienced beekeepers and also a lot of members who are new to the LBKA, many thanks for all their help and support.

I am now looking forward to an even better show in 2017, where we can continue to educate and engage with everyone regarding the plight of our pollinators!

August in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

The calendar year commences in January but many beekeepers view the new beekeeping year as commencing in August. The honey has been taken off and the beekeeper is now starting to prepare the bees for winter. The objective for August (and September) should be to put the bees in the best possible position to go into winter.

Preparing the colony for winter

A significant risk to the colony in winter having too many varroa mites in the hive. The most common form of treatment at this time of year is Apiguard. This needs to be in the colony for a minimum of 4 weeks and is most effective when the outside temperature is greater than 15°C. Early August is the optimum time to treat as the honey has been removed and temperatures are still above 15°C. Other miticides are available, not only Apiguard.

Other winter preparations that may be dealt with in August

Sound and stable hive. Hives can be checked that they are on a stable and level surface. There should be no leaks or gaps as the hive must be waterproof and draughtproof to withstand the extremely testing conditions of winter. August is also a time of robbing by other bees as the nectar supply is scarce. Wasps may also be a nuisance and so there should not be any gaps in the woodwork where they may gain entry.

Strengthen colony with young bees. Worker bees produced from eggs laid in August and September need to live for up to 6 months rather than 6 weeks. A feed of sugar syrup after the honey has been removed and a varroa treatment effectively completed will stimulate the queen into continuing her egg laying whereas, otherwise, she will be decreasing this activity.

Other action to be taken this month

Entrance blocks. Use entrance blocks to help bees defend the colony against attacks from wasps and from robbing by other bees.

Food reserves. Check that bees still have sufficient food reserves after the honey has been removed.

Uniting colonies. Unite colonies where appropriate. A large colony has a better chance of coming through the winter months than 2 small ones. Beekeepers are often tempted to overwinter 2 smaller colonies with the view to having 2 honey producing colonies next year. This is sometimes a mistake.

Reuniting colonies. If you successfully artificially swarmed a colony then the artificial swarm and colony of origin can be reunited. Alternatively, if both are large enough to overwinter then you may choose to leave and so increase your stock.

Protect and store supers against wax moth. If you have the opportunity to put super frames in a deep freeze for 48 hours then this will kill all 4 stages of the wax moth lifecycle. Take care when removing the frames as they are very brittle until the wax reaches ambient room temperature again. Acetic acid may also be used but special care is required as it is corrosive.

Burning of Sulphur strips is another method. These 3 methods may be summarised as follows:

- **Freezing:** effective against all 4 stages of Wax Moth
- **Acetic Acid:** effective against 3 stages of Wax Moth (not always against pupae)
- **Sulphur strips:** effective against 3 stages of Wax Moth (not always against eggs)

My own viewpoint is that used brood combs should be burnt and that retention is not compatible with running a hygienic apiary. Conversely, super combs are an extremely valuable resource and the beekeeper should make every effort to look after these on behalf of the bees until next spring.

LBKA Apiaries

News from LBKA's teaching apiaries.

Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk

I have been meaning to update members on how our teaching apiaries are faring. The 2016 season has been quite mixed with some challenges. Brockwell seems to be fairing well and they are now planning extracting honey within the week. Well done Petros.

Colonies at both Mudchute and Holland Park struggled coming out of winter, and for both we have had to bring in swarms to replace winter losses or reinforce weak colonies. Both are now stable and recovering well.

Eden over-wintered reasonably well but two colonies then had queens fail leaving only two strong ones to take the burden of a succession of training courses and examinations, resulting in colonies being opened, sometimes three or four times in a weekend. And then we split one colony to provide a travelling observation hive for the Lambeth Show. Some of the girls began to complain but that is what teaching apiaries are for.

After this kind of heavy use I was not really expecting honey. However, 35 million years of evolution clearly builds a lot of resilience and we now have 4 thriving colonies again, plus an observation hive. And we will get honey (and leave enough for them).

Running teaching apiaries and mentoring new beekeepers is time consuming and hard work and I would like in particular to thank Petros Hahladakis, Ted Parks and Vlad Zamfir for their time, skill and commitment to our teaching apiaries. I must also thank all those other beekeepers who are mentoring from their own apiaries. The LBKA remains convinced that good mentoring is

vital to helping new beekeepers attain good practice and high standards of the craft.

Doing BBKA Bee Basic: The agony and the ecstasy

Eugene shares his experience of doing the BBKA Bee Basic.

Eugene Fahy
 LBKA member

A few years ago, having submitted a dissertation at the end of a part-time course, I promised myself that I would never willingly sit another exam. While I had enjoyed the course, on art history, completing the final assessment had left me feeling slightly burned-out. So it was with some slight trepidation that I made the decision to take the BBKA Basic Assessment.

Why did I do it? There had been a long gap between my completing the LBKA introductory course and the decision, just over a year ago, to keep bees so I wanted an expert assessment with, I hoped, some reassurance that I had acquired a basic level of skill. I was at the monthly meeting where last year's candidates received their certificates and heard about Howard's impressive pass rate with candidates (100% so far), the quality of the course materials and the revision sessions. I mulled it over and thought, "there is no harm in registering an interest".

Mid-November brought an email from Howard with the course notes and some suggested additional reading material. I thought I would tackle the course notes over the Christmas break and see how it went from there. The notes follow the format of the one page syllabus which I downloaded from the BBKA website and they covered more than was needed for the assessment, so I never did get around to the additional reading.

Howard arranged three revision sessions over the April/May period. Well, I thought, "still no obligation to actually do the assessment – you don't have to decide until the final revision session". At the sessions we went through the syllabus line-by-line. I learned a lot from answers to questions, asked by other candidates, which had not even occurred to me. We also did a practical exercise on the artificial swarm. This is one of the compulsory questions on the syllabus and it must be passed. You only need to describe a method but Howard suggested practicing using matchboxes as props which made this part of the assessment feel like a well-

rehearsed conjuring trick. Having completed the reading and the revision sessions, the theory part seemed within my competence but I still had reservations about the practical part – excepting swarm control where I was reasonably confident of my abilities in the beekeeping version of “find the lady”. I took the plunge and during the following month reduced my notes to four or five index cards, which I read and re-read and used my own hive inspections as rehearsals for the practical.

The appointed day in June arrived and, as directed, I turned up at the LBKA apiary in Clapham an hour before my assessment. This gave me time to assemble a frame and have a few, confidence boosting, sample questions from Howard. The assessor passed my assembled frame as acceptable and watched me light the smoker and then asked rhetorically “shall we go to the bees?”

This was where things started to get a bit wobbly, literally and figuratively. As I attempted to remove the super, I did not realise, until prompted, that I was also lifting the heavily propolised queen excluder. Slightly shaken, I continued with the hive examination describing what I saw, accompanied by what I felt were approving responses from the assessor. However my near-vision could be fairly described as sub-optimal and I need a magnifying glass to spot eggs. Four frames in, I had identified pollen, honey, nectar, larvae and capped brood. The assessor said, “have you noticed any eggs?” Blind panic (excuse the pun) as I had not but, at his prompting, I looked again through the magnifying glass and tilting the frame to the sun, I could see that it was almost covered with eggs. “Not good” I thought. Then, the bees who had been slightly agitated despite, or perhaps because of, my efforts with the smoker, decided to become extremely defensive. I was wearing thin disposable gloves and was stung four or five times in the hand while the assessor was stung twice through his bee suit. While I was trying to ignore the agony of my left hand, I heard him say “OK, close it up!”

This did not feel like a good outcome but we left the apiary, followed by a number of particularly agitated bees and went back to the garden area to continue with the theory assessment. As I worked through the practical description of swarm control, we had to stop to smoke some persistent bees who were intent on warning us off from any idea of returning to the hive. Apart from this I felt that my answers to the other compulsory questions, on Varroa, AFB and EFB, were satisfactory but overall I felt slightly despondent. Well, I thought, in a week, I will know the worst. However the subsequent email from Howard brought a sense of elation (if not quite ecstasy) and relief - I had actually passed!

Why am I telling you this? Because, in my time at LBKA one of the things that has impressed me most is the willingness of experienced beekeepers to talk openly about their past and recent mistakes, usually to nods of recognition from other seasoned experts. This is both encouraging and educational for a relative novice like me. So, if you are thinking about doing the as-



Weighing bees or weighing Disraeli the cat?

essment, I would thoroughly recommend it. There is a well-trodden path at the LBKA, you will get a lot of support and end up with more knowledge than you need just to pass. Bear in mind it is an assessment not an examination; the assessor is trying to find out what you know rather than catch you out on gaps in your knowledge. I hope you may be able to learn from my mistakes and feel free to make some of your own.

What next for me – will I do some of the modules? I am still determined never to do another exam but I might be tempted to do some form of assessment – just for the reassurance, you understand!

Waxing Scientifical

Where has Sue been?

Sue Lee (@beesupontheroof)
LBKA member

So by now I expected to be sharing lots of data with you comparing my FlowHive™ with a regular hive, since the measuring equipment is mostly made and tested to a certain extent, ready to test temperature, weight and humidity, and the hives are constructed and ready to go. Instead there is no buzzing and the frames stay bare. I thought I had sufficient plans in place to ensure at least two lots of bees. I blame colony collapse in Suffolk, a breakout of European Foul Brood near Canterbury and ultimately Brexit for the withdrawal of Mann Lake from the UK Market. I am still beeless, and no data therefore.

We have encountered an unexpected issue which I am



Equipment

not sure how to deal with as Disraeli the cat clearly finds the empty hive very attractive. He weighs around 6.5 kilos so that's going to really put our figures out!

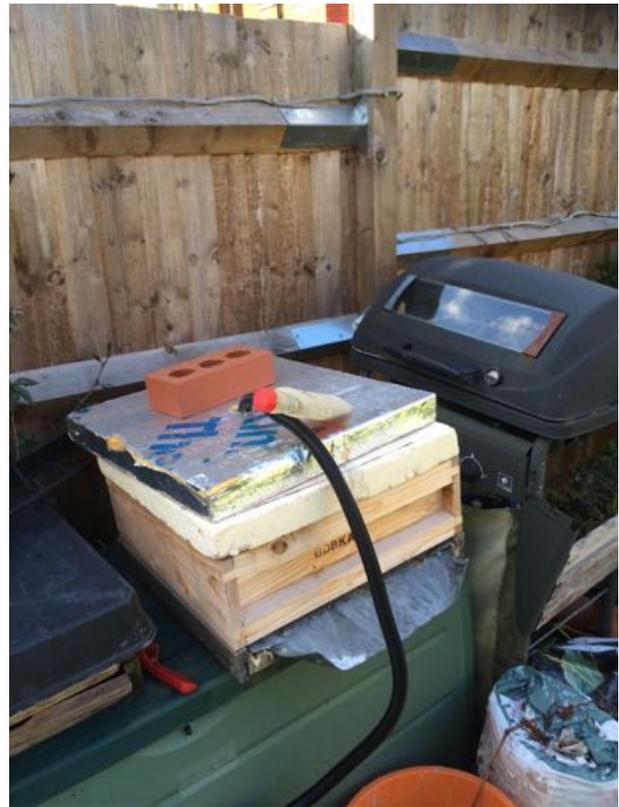
This does give us a bit more refinement time before next year, and plenty of time planning improvements so watch this space...

General Husbandry Certificate: what it's really like

Geoff has also been doing an assessment. His experiences are a useful, interesting and an amusing read.

Geoff Hood
LBKA member

The perception is that the assessment for General Husbandry Certificate is very difficult and that you need years and years of experience and knowledge under your



Wax melter

belt before contemplating this assessment. However BBKA News recently said it is "easy" and that all you need is three production colonies upon which to take the assessment, a nuc capable of bringing on to a full sized colony, the kit for performing the practical tasks, and spare kit for operating your set up and overcoming any reasonable obstacles (e.g. swarming). You also need to show your extraction and bottling kit (though you could borrow this). An extra that most urban beekeepers don't do is that you also need to have a small queen rearing programme underway (perhaps raising five queens cells being reared to re-queen your three or four colonies) but you will need a larger programme if you have more hives.

So I took my GHC in June. What is it really like doing it?

First, what you also need is the relevant bits of underlying knowledge to support your practical work. The knowledge level is that contained in Ted Hooper's 'Guide to Bees and Honey' and the APHA Disease and Pest publications. You don't need to be an expert, just have an understanding, so that you can recognise and respond appropriately to problems (and their questions). The Mid-Buckinghamshire BKA blogs on Module 1,2 and 3 are a good source of information (and are free <https://blog.mbbka.org.uk/category/education>). You don't need all the information in the blog, but you need to know the honey Regulation and label regulations, etc.

If you only have a few hives, I would say you will really need to have looked in more hives than just your



Queen rearing



Equipment



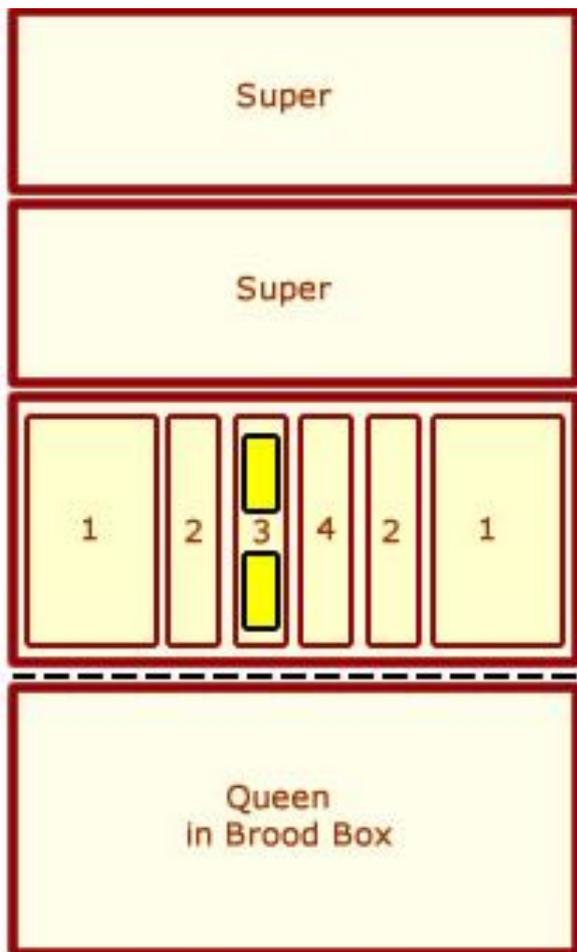
Queen cells



Ben Harden hive



Selecting larvae



Ben Harden method

own. It's having the hive hours and experience of other beekeepers' practice and manipulations that you need so that you know when things are being done well and when they aren't. Knowing what a strong and healthy hive looks like and what calm bees are like to work. So helping out at the training apiary or mentoring one or two beginners gives you that added insight because you need to tell the assessor just the things that beginners need to know.

I would also suggest you need five hives going into winter not three to ensure that by June/July you have three production colonies, I started in the winter by sorting out the shed where I kept all my spare kit. I really found some horrors hidden in its depth such as an unused bottle of deep orange coloured oxalic acid that expired 2013, an empty tub Fumidill B (now banned from sale) and my first beesuit that was useless and moth eaten. This all went in the dustbin. All of those other bits that were scattered around were organised into small plastic tubs, hammers and nails, frame side bars, queen rearing stuff, hive tools (lots of other things that I thought I had lost!) It now all looked quite smart. Rather than the usual pile of assorted top bars and frame side in a large box, I could actually see that I needed to order, say, more brood frames but had enough super frames for two or three years.

Everything has to be clean so I spent several sunny winter days scraping and blow-torching brood boxes, queen excluders and supers. Not that I don't do that normally, but I never do it in advance – usually in a rush just before things swarm or a heavy flow. I spent hours cleaning the cones and undersides my English Feeders and bleaching my poly hive, I sterilised my extractor, buckets and filters, then I made my 25g wax blocks for sale as you need to show you can make products of the hive, what more could I do?

So by mid-March, spring had sprung and I opened up my first hive and did a shook swarm on the hive that needed a complete frame change, it being a serial propoliser. Mid April and while inspecting during a warm spell I found queen cells and did a Pagden Artificial Swarm. The weather did not play ball; 2015 marked and clipped queens appeared to have superseded, two queens in one hive, a bent Queen excluder giving brood in first super, meant I was fighting a losing battle!

The GHC assessment day came and I set up my extractor in the kitchen, displayed wax and on the dining room table with my jarred-up (and labelled) honey, hive records, honey sale records, photo of queen rearing and my 1st prize certificate at the London bench of the national Honey show. I had three colonies with supers on and queen cells being raised in a breeder colony. My wife took the dog to work for the day. I was ready.

The Assessors arrived on time and we had a cup of tea but due to a forecast of rain we then went directly to my apiary. On arrival at the apiary my hood zip stuck

and took five minutes to fix. After that, things only got worse! The first task was find the queen, mark her, clip her wing and make her safe in a queen cage. I found her, marked her and then reached for the scissors to find the queen was now half way up my arm. Retrieving her I clipped her and popped her in a cage. I then had to do a Pagden artificial swarm, but halfway through it started to drizzle. They then said ok, now do a disease inspection and I had wet bees every where as the rain got heavier. They helped put the hive back together then asked me to demonstrate a shook swarm on the next hive. Now under large umbrellas due to heavy rain, I checked my hive records before I started the shook swarm and found my notes were now wet and unreadable, it took some time to find the queen and make her safe and I was asked to add five workers to the cage as if I wanted to keep her longer out of the hive. It then started to hail, which my normally docile bees **noticed** (the hail was bouncing off the roof and top bars) so I got a sting, but stoically I did not scream (or swear as I normally do).

As the thunder rolled around Mill Hill, the assessors decided they'd seen enough and we decided to go back to my house, but before we upped sticks, I had to show my queen rearing skills. I had to resort to grafting in my Ben Harden method starter/raiser colony which is something I find hard to do. I opened up just as lightning flashed but I had four out of five perfect Queen cells just about to be capped.

We all hurried back to my house and after a general discussion at home over another cup of tea, we then moved on to look at honey extracting and bottling facilities. They asked a few set questions, "What you need to make your jar label legal?" "What temperatures you would heat the honey to and for how long, the significance of HMF, how you check jar weights, etc?" They then looked at my storage facilities for honey and whether spare hive equipment was sufficient and clean, including four queen mating nucs. Finally we had general discussions on other topics or practical activities that one might undertake in the apiary, extracting room and wax recovery; which made for a nice, gentle wind-down.

They left after four and a half hours, telling me that the result would come through in six weeks. I went direct to the pub, I was exhausted.

A letter that arrived ten days after the assessment with a Sheffield postmark raised no suspicions. I opened it to find it was from Val Francis at the BBKA to say that I had passed the General Husbandry Certificate.

Facebook (In)digest(ion)

No Facebook digest this month – anyone fancy doing it next month?

Adventures in Beeland: The Hive at Kew

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

*Emily Scott
LBKA member*

Try to imagine yourself inside a bee colony. Close your eyes so that it's dark. Imagine yourself to be one of many thousands now, crawling amongst the comforting scent and hum of your sisters. You can feel their vibrations speaking to you, shaking out many messages. The wax combs carry throbbing tales of flowers for the taking, of your queen, of work to be done. You touch a sister with your antennae and she stops to give you sweet nectar; you pick up a heady regal waft as she does so, and you know your queen is amongst you.

Communication – vibrations – messages – the busy world inside a hive. The magnificently bearded artist Wolfgang Buttress has tried to recreate some of this experience for visitors in his new artwork at Kew Gar-



The Hive meadow

dens, 'The Hive'. Ealing beekeepers have even had some involvement in this as one of our members, Llyr Jones (Jonesy) looks after the bees at Kew. Jonesy also keeps bees on the rooftop of the John Lewis HQ – you can read about this on the 'Meet our honey bees' section of their website.

The Kew website explains how The Hive works:

"The installation is made from thousands of pieces of aluminium which create a lattice effect and is fitted with hundreds of LED lights that glow and fade as a unique soundtrack hums and buzzes around you.

These multi-sensory elements of the Hive are in fact responding to the real-time activity of bees in a beehive behind the scenes at Kew. The sound and light intensity within the space changes as the energy levels in the real beehive surge, giving visitors an insight into life inside a bee colony.

With a wildflower meadow leading the way to The Hive, it will be a truly immersive, multi-sensory experience taking visitors on a journey, exploring the vital role of bees and other pollinators in feeding the planet."

The activity levels of the bees are transmitted through 'accelerometers', vibration sensors which have been placed in a hive at Kew to measure the activity of the colony. The accelerometers pick up the bees' vibrations and send them in real-time to the Hive installation. The changing vibrational signals then influence both the soundtrack and the lighting effects, so that the 1,000 LED lights which line the interior of the Hive become a visual representation of the bee colony's activity.

I visited this week and took a few photos. Buggies are not allowed in the Hive, so bear in mind that the photos were taken one handed whilst holding a wriggling baby. He was very awake and fairly grumpy so my visit was not as long as I would have liked!

Visitors walk up to the Hive through a one-acre wildflower meadow specially planted with 34 native species which appeal to bees. Ironically I saw bees everywhere elsewhere in the gardens but not in the meadow. Awkward customers.

First you walk beneath the structure and can look up into it. For this reason Jonesy gave me the useful tip not to wear a skirt! A member of staff was enthusiastically giving short talks about bees and how the installation works. There are also bone conductor booths. These were very popular – you place a wooden stick in your mouth and can then feel four different examples of vibrations made by honey bees (including queen piping and the waggle dance) travelling through the booths to your skull. As I was holding Tommy, unfortunately I couldn't try these out.

You then walk up a path through the meadow into the



The Hive below



White clover nectar information

installation. There are signs like the one above to read on the way. I found it interesting that white clover is so important for UK bees.

Once inside the main structure above, there is a lovely gentle throbbing humming noise surrounding you. Meanwhile the LED lights perched on the walls glow on and off in ever-changing patterns. I liked to imagine that they represented individual bees touching or sharing nectar with each other. The ebbs and flows of the music are quite soothing and even Tommy seemed to enjoy it and calm down a little. Of course it gets quite crowded up there, but perhaps that helps recreate the intense atmosphere of a busy bee colony!

I discovered the bees themselves later, in a much quieter part of the gardens. Smaller bumblebee boxes have been set up (seen to the right of the photo) as well as the honey bee hives. I wonder if the bumbles have been successfully persuaded to stay in them, as they are fussy about using man-made homes!

There are many interesting facts to read about bees scattered amongst the gardens. Wolfgang Buttress and Kew have really put a lot of effort into raising people's awareness of our lovely pollinators.



The Hive



The Hive roof



The Hive floor

Scientists are discovering new information about honey bee communication all the time and it is clear that their use of vibrations to communicate goes well beyond the waggle dance. Wolfgang Buttrus was inspired by the work of Dr Martin Bencsik, whose research team at Nottingham Trent University has pioneered using accelerometers within hives to detect and translate the vibrations made by the bees. For instance, the team has detected a specific range and amplitude of vibra-

tions used by bees when planning a swarm, up to two weeks before swarming occurs.

By the way, according to Nottingham Trent uni's website Dr Bencsik currently works within an EU-funded consortium which includes research institutions, beekeeping associations and businesses. I hope his work will continue to be funded once we leave the EU.



LED lights



Hives at Kew

More about The Hive:

- Listen to secrets of a honeybee hive in Kew's latest sculpture – New Scientist, June 2016 – explains in more detail how the installation works.
- Feel the buzz: the album recorded by 40,000 bees – The Guardian, June 2016 – explains how The Hive's soundtrack was created using bees, human vocals, cello, guitar, harmonica and autoharp

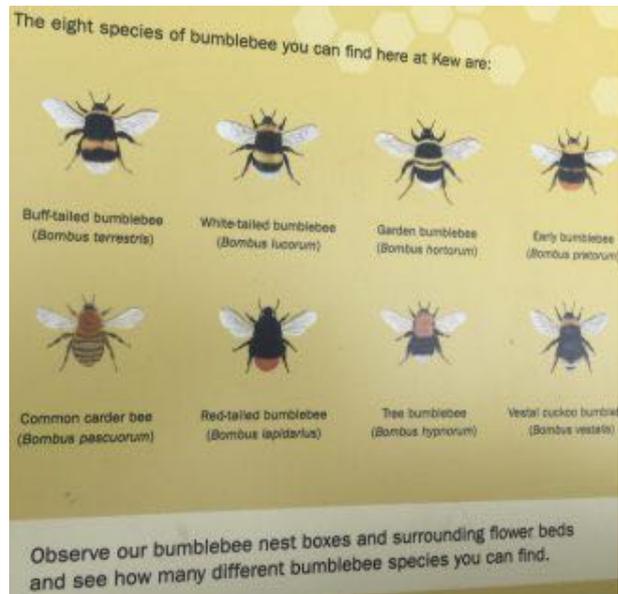
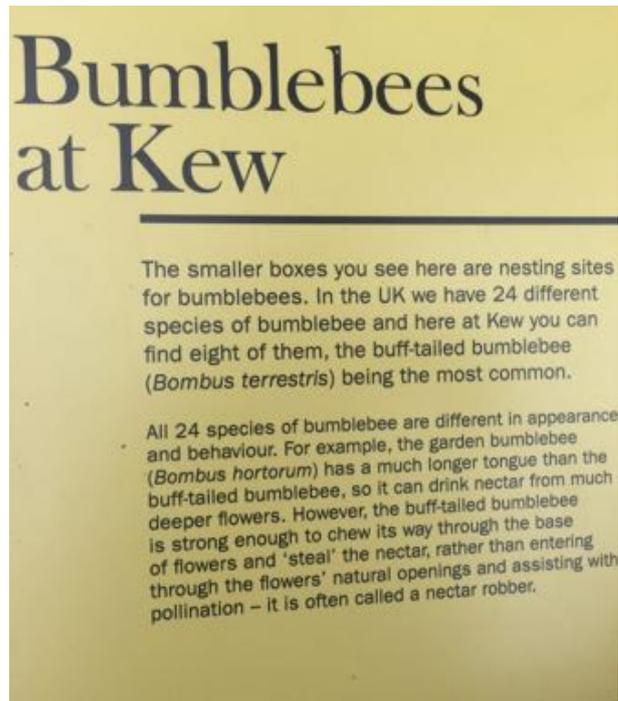
Readers' letters

From Martin Hudson

Dear LKBA news,

As LBKA News' proof-reader and, as such, the advantage of an 'advance copy' of this wonderful newsletter, may I start off the 'discussion' suggested by Richard on page 2?

My apiary (of one hive, currently) is situated on the Northern edge of Greater London, in High Barnet –



Bumblebee species at the Bee shed at Kew

only a mile or so from open countryside, but benefitting from the allotments on which it is sited, but also open meadow valleys next to the Totteridge ridge, also less than a mile away. However, compared to what I have heard from various other beekeepers in Barnet and in LBKA, I seem to have been remarkably lucky with my honey crop this year.

In early June, I took two supers (45lb) of spring honey from them, but the bees have now fully capped another four supers, which I intend to remove this weekend – making a total of potentially 120-130lb of honey this year!) - and leaving one and a half more supers/stores for them to take down into the (standard National) brood box when they have made room. I am concerned that reducing the hive from 6 supers + brood box to just a brood box will leave insufficient room for what seems to be a still prolific and numerous colony. My intention was to start Apiguard treatment as soon as the returned wet supers had been cleaned, but I cannot find clear advice (on the internet) about what to do with the semi-filled supers I have left on, and where to place the Apiguard (although most 'advice' seems to say this should be directly above the brood frames). So my questions are:

- Do I put the fuller of the two supers underneath the brood box to encourage the ladies to bring it up to the brood box)?
- Do I put the emptier of the two supers above the crown board, so that they clear it down?
- Do I take them both off until the treatment is finished? or
- Do I leave them both above the brood box, and place the Apiguard in an eke above them?

I know that I am asking beekeepers four questions (above) so will expect at least five different answers (probably to each one!), but I would welcome your views, and those of other LBKA members – either at the Summer Social on 14 August – or by e-mail to martin.hudson@mcr1.poptel.org.uk. Thank you.

Martin Hudson

Members' marketplace

This section is for members offering beekeeping items or services to members or requesting items. Items could include nucs, wax and honey. Email services@lbka.org.uk to add something here.

Meetal Patel: Looking for bulk quantities of (preferably unjarred) honey from in/around the London area. This will be used for either onward jarring or to use

to brew as part of my honey beer project, where my own hives are no longer sufficient. Happy to answer questions if it helps! Contact meetal_patel@hotmail.com.

Eleanor Wyllie: I'm giving up beekeeping for the moment and am selling all my equipment and a colony: **two hives** (both 14×12 but one can be converted back to standard British national size); **one colony** (new queen from this year, quite strong, some stores but will likely need feeding with sugar syrup) **three supers** (one full set of super frames); **extra frames** (some 14×12 ones made up and some 14×12 and super not made up); **standard nuc box**; **hive tools** (×2); **bee suits**: one medium, one small; **leather gauntlets** (×1); **syrup feeders** (×2), **entrance blocks and mouse guards** (×2); **fondant**; **smoker**; **tub for settling honey** (with tap); **queen cage**; **queen marker pen** (last year's colour); **hive beetle strips**; and **varroa boards**. Please contact eleanorwyllie@gmail.com for more information.

Upcoming events

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

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

This month's monthly meeting is about bee feeders - all you ever wanted to know about them. Our Summer Social immediately follows (involving feeding of a different kind). The Chickpea Sisters (<http://www.chickpeasisters.com/>) will be cooking up and serving up fantastic food and we'll provide drinks. This free event is for members (and their invited friends) only. We hope to see you there! You're welcome to bring a couple of friends and/or family. Please email David at treasurer@lbka.org.uk to let us know if you're coming to help us plan the catering.

2nd, 3rd and 4th September: Integrated Varroa Management

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

These day-long workshops are run by LASI in Sussex, please see their web page (<http://www.sussex.ac.uk/lasi/newsandevents/events?id=34718>) for more details and how to book.

Sunday 11th September: Monthly meeting: Uniting colonies for winter

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

We'll talk about the relative merits of uniting colonies or otherwise for winter, how to do it, and people experiences of this. 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.

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/>.

