



The London Beekeepers' Association LBKA News

January, 2017

Welcome to the first newsletter of 2017! Richard starts the newsletter off with a summary of recent changes within the committee. Jon writes up his fantastic Christmas Quiz last month. Geoff tells us of a recent holiday to Sri Lanka that seems to have been taken over by Giant Honey Bees... in a good way! Sally recounts her less happy experience of moving honey bees to a new site – fingers crossed for her bees! Thanks also to regular contributors: Howard who reminds us what we should be doing in our apiary, Eugene who summarises discussion on our open Facebook page, and Emily who gives us another look inside Ealing Bees' apiary. And we have our second Reader's letter (keep 'em coming)!

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Thanks to this month's contributors: **Eugene Fahy, Jon Harris, Sally Haywill, Geoff Hood, Richard Glassborow, Howard Nichols, and Emily Scott.** Thanks in particular to those who sent me material without me asking for it – this makes things a bit easier for me. Thanks – as usual – to Martin Hudson for proof-reading this edition.

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

Happy New year to all LBKA members! Although of course, strictly speaking we are halfway through the bee-keeping year!

I trust those of you who keep bees are keeping an eye on hive stores. We have had a lot of unseasonably warm weather and the bees have been flying and using up stores which cannot always be replaced at this time of year. It seems to be big colonies in particular that can go light quite suddenly.

Looking ahead into 2017, I am pleased to say that the committee has been busy trying to get ahead of the game. Dates are in the committee management calendar and venues booked for all events, activities and courses for the rest of the year. There are of course bound to be new things cropping up but it is reassuring to know that our core offer is already well under way.

There have been a few changes in the Officer roles. After several years of excellent work building up the



Frosted bramble leaf. Photo: Mark Patterson.

mentoring team, Tristram Sutton is handing over this role to Elliot Hodges. Elliot's first task will be to contact existing mentors to confirm their availability again this year but also to recruit new mentors. I know I go on about it a lot, but mentoring is a really rewarding thing to get involved in and can also be really helpful as you get an extra pair of hands to help in your apiary. You really do not need to be a particularly experienced beekeeper to be a mentor. If you need it there will be plenty of support to call upon so you will learn more and faster by mentoring. Please consider putting your name forward (mentoring@lbka.org.uk) or saying you are prepared to have a go when Elliot gives you a tap on the shoulder.

Tristram meanwhile has taken on the role of Resources manager, looking after all our equipment which, as you know, is now stored at Walworth Garden. This makes so much sense as Tristram already manages the apiary at Walworth. So when the time comes to hire extractors or pick up nucs to hive swarms on behalf of the LBKA, Tristram is the one to contact (resources@lbka.org.uk) and Walworth garden will be the place to collect and return.

Emma Nye, after years of sterling service as secretary, has handed over the role to Natalie Cotton. This is always a demanding role in any organisation but probably more so in a voluntary organisation where support and response is not always as crisp as it might be in a full-time team. I thank Emma for her thoroughness, perseverance and patience in carrying out this role and I look forward to her continued contribution to the work of the committee. In the mean time, Natalie is already off to a flying start in the role: the committee and trustees are clearly in good hands.

Vlad Zamfir, who is apiary manager and mentor at our teaching apiary at Mudchute, has taken over from me as Apiary officer. Although our apiary managers are encouraged to be autonomous in the day to day running of their apiary, it is helpful to have someone at committee level to be responsible for our apiary policies and strategies and to coordinate the overall implementation and dealings with existing and new potential apiary hosts.

These are the committee changes. I have not included the officers that have not changed roles but I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the committee members. You are a fantastic team and it is a pleasure to work with you. The LBKA is very lucky to have so many able people prepared to put in so much hard work. Here's to 2017!

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

The newsletter was not ready in time to announce this month's Monthly Meeting, but members will have received an email about it.

February's Monthly Meeting will be on **Sunday 12th February** on a new topic – pollen identification! Bring some flowers with pollen in and Howard will show us how to mount it on slides. There will be existing slides of mounted pollen and we will also have pollen identification charts available. The meeting will be in at the usual place and time of **Fairley House Junior School** (220 Lambeth Rd, SE1 7JY) at 11:00.

2017 BBKA Basic Assessment – Act Now!

The London Beekeepers' Association encourages its members to take the BBKA basic assessment. As usual, we will run a free course in April 2017 for members wishing to take this assessment. The BBKA requirement for entry is that the applicant has been keeping bees for a minimum period of 1 year. The assessment is fairly straightforward and the syllabus can be downloaded free of charge from the BBKA website.

Each year at least one member decides, too late in the day, to sign up for this assessment after all the arrangements have been made with the BBKA. They are disappointed as we cannot undo and rearrange everything just to accommodate an extra individual. The time to decide to take this is now, not in April or May.

The suggested timetable is as follows:

1. Winter reading – now
2. Three 2-hour evening revision sessions in late March and April, probably at Walworth Garden Farm or Roots and Shoots.
3. Assessments to be taken as an apiary in south London in May.

Any LBKA member who has been managing bees for a minimum of 12 months and wishes to take this assessment please confirm by email to education@lbka.org.uk. Howard Nichols (our education officer) will then be able to let you have some electronic course notes to read at your leisure. Please register your interest now, not when it is too late. You do not need to commit yourself to anything else at this stage

The BBKA website should be sufficient to deal with any queries regarding the assessment. Alternatively, ask another LBKA member who has taken it. Preparation

for the Basic is an interesting way of continuing your beekeeping activities through the winter months. It is also often a requirement if intending to keep bees in a public place such as an allotment.

See last August's newsletter for a writeup of how it was to do BBKA Bee Basic: http://lbka.org.uk/downloads/lbkanews_2016-08.pdf

Want to be on the Swarm list?

BBKA have a website (http://www.bbka.org.uk/help/find_a_swarm_coordinator.php) where members of the public can type in a postcode and get the names and phone numbers of nearby beekeepers who are willing to deal with swarms. This is an important service to the public, but be aware that your name and phone will be on a public website and that not everyone knows what a swarm looks like. In general, we expect swarm collectors to pass swarms to us, for which you'll receive £20 or so for expenses.

If you'd like to be added or to find out more, contact Natalie on admin@lbka.org.uk.



Find a swarm collector

New committee roles

Tristram has now taken the role as resources officer, overseeing our equipment, their storage and their maintenance. You can contact him on resources@lbka.org.uk.

Elliot is now in charge of our mentoring programme. Messages to mentoring@lbka.org.uk will now go to him at elliott.hodges@lbka.org.uk.

Vlad is now overseeing our apiaries. Messages to apiaries@lbka.org.uk will now go to him at vlad.zamfir@lbka.org.uk.

Courses

Introduction to Beekeeping. This is our flagship full beekeeping weekend course which includes mentoring for the rest of the season and LBKA membership. This is for people who think they might like to keep bees. The 22nd–23rd April course is full, but we have places

left on the one we're running on 6th–7th May. It costs £150. Places sell out quickly!

A Taste of Beekeeping. We will run a half-day course on 21 May. This is intended for those who are just interested in learning more about beekeeping. Those who wish to prepare for keeping bees should do our 2-day course. This taster course costs £40.

To register your place on these courses, or get more information, go to <http://www.lbka.org.uk/courses.html>.



LBKA courses

Seeds

We've a surplus of unsold LBKA-branded pollinator-friendly seeds that have a Spring 2017 sow-by date on them. Each packet costs £2, covers a 2m² area and we have a **buy one get one free offer**. We'll be selling them at monthly meetings.

Are you able to sell any seeds? Perhaps you know of somewhere that would sell them? Talk to a committee member if you'd like some seeds to try and sell.



LBKA seeds

NBU's 2016 Annual Reports are out

The National Bee Unit has published its annual reports. It's worth having a read of the one for the SE region. You can download them from <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/index.cfm?pageid=168>. For the

**INTERNATIONAL
MEETING OF
YOUNG
BEEKEEPERS
MARLBOROUGH
COLLEGE JULY 6th to
JULY 9th 2017**



Could you, or someone you know, be a member of Team England this year?

This year we will be holding the annual selection day for the IMYB team on Sunday March 5th at the BBKA HQ at Stoneleigh Park. To qualify to take part in IMYB you must be aged 12, but no more than 16, on January 1st 2017. You must also have taken and passed the BBKA Basic Assessment and be a member of a BBKA affiliated association or an individual member of the BBKA.

If you want to take part in the selection day or want any further details, contact Ian Homer at the email address below but do it quickly, March 5th will soon be with us!!

At the moment, it seems likely that some of the assessments of the competition itself will be carried out at the recently completed "Hive" installation at Kew Gardens with the main activities being completed at Marlborough College itself. Funding is coming in well and planning for the event is well under way with 16 countries having accepted the invitation to take part so far. India and Armenia are first time participants and we may also have a team coming from the USA for the first time though this is yet to be confirmed.

We also have recently received confirmation that the Government will be supporting the event with Lord Gardiner, under Secretary of State at the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs delivering the opening address.

Opportunities like this are rare so do contact Ian if you want to take part.



Young Beekeepers are our future

Encourage your school to start a beekeeping club

Make schools aware that bees are not dangerous – they are our lifeline!

Ask your link Trustee to help you – they may be able to visit your local school

Countries who have said they will take part so far:

- | | |
|----------------|-------------|
| Albania | India |
| Armenia | Ireland |
| Austria | Israel |
| Belarus | Kazakhstan |
| Czech Republic | Kyrgyzstan |
| Denmark | Netherlands |
| England | Scotland |
| Germany | Slovakia |

Ian Homer

BBKATrustee and IMYB coordinator for the BBKA

ian.homer@bbka.org.uk

January 2017

SE region, the mild weather was noted, resulting in stores being used up quickly, higher varroa than usual and less effective oxalic acid treatments. Cases of both AFB and EFB were found and beekeepers are urged to remind themselves of how to spot it. There are also reports about the Asian Hornet and Small Hive Beetle.

Honey selling opportunity

We're planning to have a stall at the Royal Horticultural Society Early Spring Show on 14–15 February (<https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-london-shows/rhs-early-spring-plant-fair>) and will be able to sell members' honey. Do you have any more honey to sell? If so, you can bring it along to the monthly meeting and we'll try and sell it for you. If you'd like to help at the show, contact Mark on forage@lbka.org.uk.

New shelving in our storage space

One of Elliot's first actions since joining the committee was donating shelves to our storage space at Walworth Garden. This has enabled us to fit more equipment in and to organise it better. Thanks Elliot!

Old announcements from December

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

New committee. As a result of the elections at the AGM, the committee remains with two new additions: **Natalie Cotton** and **Elliot Hodges**. Natalie is the new secretary. See the back page for the full list.

Upcoming monthly meetings. Our exciting monthly meeting have been announced for the coming year. See <http://lbka.org.uk/events.html>.

LBKA membership. Contact Aidan on services@lbka.org.uk for any membership queries. Members can log onto the **members' area** at http://lbka.org.uk/members_area.html.

Surrey Bee Day. The Surrey Beekeepers Association are organising **Surrey Bee Day** on **Saturday 18th February**. Tickets are £24 including lunch. For more details contact rickwoods@lbka.org.uk.

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.

Last month's Monthly Meeting: Christmas Quiz

What happened last month.

Jon Harris
LBKA member

The annual LBKA Christmas quiz got off to a great start, with plenty of Christmas goodies for all to enjoy. The quiz took its normal format of 30 questions and a tie breaker, just in case! This year, like last, we decided to have a mix of "must know" and really obscure questions to tax members. The questions were supplied from a number of sources to ensure fairness and fun!

The winners of the 2016 quiz were the team containing Geoff Hood, Emily Abbot, Martin and Angie Hudson. Some in the team considered Geoff to be their main asset, so try and get him in your team next year!

A great deal of healthy and friendly debate was had over a few questions, but we all remained friends. It was also nice to see that some of the questions prompted some debate and discussion post the quiz, which can only be a good thing for all.

Here is to the 2017 quiz, which I can guarantee will be the toughest yet!

January in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

January is a quiet time for beekeepers but an eye must still be kept on the apiary. Make sure that the roof has not been blown off by winds or that woodpeckers have not taken an interest in the hive. Woodpecker damage is more likely to occur when the ground is hard as they cannot find insects in the earth and so can turn their attention to beehives. The green woodpecker *Picus viridis*, is the main culprit.



A bad case of wax moth

The queen should now have started to lay again, albeit in a small way.

Varroa strategy. If not already done in December then Api-bioxal should be administered early January and the time taken to open the hive and administer is all done in less than 1 minute as the bees are in a cluster. As always, it is essential to wear a veil when opening the colony to treat. Do not take chances.

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

Wax moth. Check stored frames for evidence of wax moth infestation (see picture which shows the extent of damage that can be found together with wax moth larvae, pupae and distinctive black faeces).

Food stores. If the colony went into the winter with the recommended 35lb of stores then feeding will not be necessary. If stores are light then only candy or fondant should be used at this time of year. (Sugar syrup should be avoided as it will excite the bees and so disturb the cluster. The bees are also unable to process syrup in winter and it is then liable to fermentation). Feeding is



Api-Bioxal: an oxalic acid-based treatment against Varroa.

not usually necessary in January, more of a March task as the bees are then flying and consuming stores at a considerably faster rate than in January.

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

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

Site relocation. January is a good time to relocate a hive as the bees are not flying. Relocation within the apiary or within a 3 mile radius can be done at this time but better to check the weather and do this when there is going to be a severe cold spell for at least 1 week after the move.

Cleaning old equipment. Best time to do this is immediately after it is taken out of use in autumn. If still not done then winter is preferable to cleaning in the spring immediately before re use. Attention to general cleanliness and maintenance of old equipment is part of apiary hygiene strategy.

Candles and honey recipes. For those who process beeswax then winter is the usual time of year for this

activity. Honey foodstuffs can, of course, be prepared and eaten at any time of year.

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

Education. Education and practical experience are the 2 routes through which beekeepers develop their skills. Education may arise from a variety of routes but Beecraft is a substantial resource. If you do not currently subscribe to Beecraft then January is a good month take out an annual subscription.

Back from the brink? A sorry tale of moving bees

A sorry tale... but a useful one to share.

Sally Haywill
LBKA member

Now that the weather seems truly in winter mode, with sharp frosts and frozen ponds, even in Tottenham, I am reminded of advice from a beekeeper in Devon. She said "Don't worry about the 3 mile thing, just move them in the depths of winter, they won't be foraging".

Unfortunately I was not able to take her advice, as at short notice I had to move my bees in the late Spring of 2016. The colony was huge, on a deep brood and 2 supers, and had been strong and resilient for over 4 years. Shortly before the bees had to be moved, at the end of April, I too had moved from Stamford Hill to Tottenham, but had hoped to leave the bees in their splendid nature reserve home. The timing could hardly have been worse. The weather was awful, cold and wet for days on end. I was extremely busy, both with work and caring for an ailing mother who lived a long way out of London.

I was however lucky in that a generous friend offered me a space on her allotment in Tottenham on which to place my hive. But the prospect of moving the bees filled me with dread. I had never had to move a hive myself before, and this was a particularly huge and robust one. Yet I was also extremely fortunate in that good friends from East London BeeKeepers rallied round and provided me with everything I needed – they checked my plan, a car, other vital moving equipment, and best of all, their willing time and effort. Issy, Lorraine, John and Joss – I am forever indebted to you all.

The actual moving day, 23th April, turned out to be



The hive before the move



The hive in Lorraine's car.



The moving crew.

atrocious, very cold and rainy, with a nasty northerly wind (I note from my bee records). A further disaster, the bees in the top super had not gone down through the porter escapes. We needed to take off that top super in order to strap together the deep brood box and one super, in order to get it to fit into the car! So the bees had to be shaken off, and many ended up being shaken off onto a board I quickly grabbed and placed at an angle leading up to the entrance. Inevitably, given how cold and wet it was, many succumbed, and I think it was probably at this point that we lost the queen. She could have easily been in the top super, as I am pretty sure I had not yet put on the Queen excluder (why not?!) At the time I was not aware of this.

We made it to the new site and the hive was installed, with the top super, with many supers full of honey, being put on the next day. However we had found many dead bees on the crown board after the move, and things just didn't look right.

On the 24th April the temperature was 6°C max with a bit of rain early morning but also hail showers mid morning. 30th April I note about 20 dead bees in the SE corner of the varroa board.

By the 18th May only a few solitary bees were seen flying in and out of the hive, and though I see a bee with

yellow pollen coming in it was at this point I believed the colony had crashed. I note that although I see a few bees flying in and out, it is far far fewer than had been flying earlier in the year (before the move). On the 5th June, and several times over the next few weeks, I see bees coming out of the hive carrying what looked like white larvae – dead? Diseased? I note that I only saw pollen coming in on the 30th June. My comment on the weather section of my bee records reads like the understatement of the year: "Overall a rainy spring". I note rain on the 12th, 14th and 26 June, with a few thunderstorms thrown in for good measure. On the 5th July I count 7 bees coming in or going out in a long 30 second count – not a constant stream as on the old site, but activity nonetheless.

I feel despondent about the future survival of the colony, and am away on and off over the summer. On 18th August Issy and I do a complete inspection, and find there are about 6 frames of honey, and the colony (bees, larvae and eggs) is down to 4 frames two thirds of the way back from the super above the now empty brood box. This is minute, and might not survive the winter. I am advised by good friends to put the colony into a polynuc. But I am stubborn, and reason that, the colony having almost perished, but having fought its way back to life somehow, deserve to be left alone as much as possible, albeit with a bit of help in the form of insulation below and above, and food over the winter if needed. On their previous site they had plenty of pollen and nectar very close at hand. On the new site they were in completely different surrounding vegetation wise, and with competition from two other colonies nearby, let alone other colonies that are likely to be in the area, but that I do not know about. I reasoned that they had had to adjust and adapt so much, and had just about succeeded, and so should be left in their home, instead of being turfed out all over again.

Part of my records for 5th October 2016 read:

2 frames in the deep brood box, the rear one with one side lots of honey but in a very 'wavy' undulating surface.

Bees on 4 and a half frames in the super above, active and not unduly worried about being opened up.

Put an old (2014) emergency honey frame in the honey super above, where the bees have built up 2 or 3 chunky both sides frames of honey.

The emergency frame has honey only on one side and can't remember if I put it facing forwards or better hopefully, facing back towards the rest of the frames which are centrally above the brood.

Above the honey super cover board.

Above that put the white eke, with just three 'duvets' in paper bags, two leaves, one straw.



The hive with the wall of green netting (as stipulated by the Allotment Officers as a requirement of keeping bees on the allotment). The bees kept bumping into it at first!

Needs at least two more big bags to insulate.

On 5th October I put on 1lb of sugar syrup, and see big balls of yellow pollen on some of the bees legs.

I disappear to France for much of the latter part of October. On 23th November I see that all the syrup has gone and I put a slab of Neopoll over the cover board hole. There is a mass of bees bubbling up through the hole. I complete the 'leaf duvets' (the leaves are stuffed into old envelopes and pushed into the eke above the cover board).

On the 14th December I note there are lots of bees flying in and out, and many are carrying large blobs of light yellow pollen.

On the 5th January 2017 I take off the now completely empty packet of Neopoll (with a lot of condensation inside) and replace with a new one. Again, a mass of bees bubble up from the cover board hole. No bees seen flying but HURRAY they are still alive! Possibly the biggest test now awaits them. Can they survive to the end of March? This is often the trickiest time of the year in terms of a colony's survival. Re-reading my bee records I think perhaps I should add a column to record my emotional state – because I know it ebbs and flows along with my perception of how bees' are doing.

I know I was downhearted after the move and it seemed that the colony was doomed, but elated just a few days ago to know that they had survived the disastrous move after all, to make it past the winter solstice. Fingers crossed they make it to the Spring Equinox.

Where do beekeepers go on holiday?

Geoff shares stories of his holidays.

Geoff Hood
LBKA member

Before I kept bees, I would always take a walking or touring holiday in the UK in April, May or June. However, since keeping bees, I no longer take holidays then because it's the swarming season. I now take my holidays in February. I like a warm weather holiday so instead of the Pembrokeshire coastal path in February, I



Fruit bats.

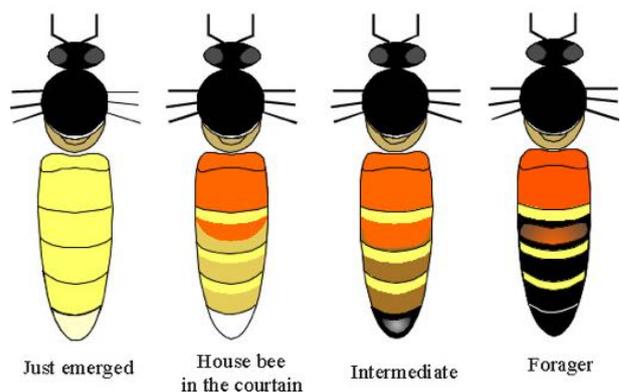


The tea plantation were my wife lived.



Apis dorsata.

Apis dorsata workers



ventured farther afield to Northern Sri Lanka. This holiday was planned to include a visit to two of my wife's former family homes on tea plantations in the Uva and Ury area.

So we hired a driver and transport and pre-booked Hostels & Hotels of very varying standards. These ranged from those in Trincomalee – on white sand beaches, air conditioning, serving 5 star international food – to former rest houses that are now hostels in a Jaffna peninsula – with wicker beds, mosquito nets, gecko catching Mosquitos and the best curries I have ever had.



Apis dorsata on a Bhuddist temple.



Emerging Apis dorsata worker.



Tree Colonies Tea Plantation Ury.



Nest 80ft up a tree.



Apis dorsate worker.

I had expected to see a few honey bees but was quite surprised to see a migratory swarm of *Apis dorsata*, the Giant Honey Bee on the window sill of my first hotel in Colombo, From then on my holiday focused on honey bees as well as touring.

Apis dorsata is a cliff or high tree dwelling honeybee. In Sri Lanka because most land is cleared for agricul-

ture or building, bees have had to adapt. In the city, any tall building can become a home for giant honey bees. This means that a lot of Buddhist temples are adorned with bee colonies of 100,000+ bees because the monks do not remove them or collect the honey. In the mountain tea plantations, the Giant Honey bees use the tall trees planted to shelter the tea plants from the intense summer sun. Giant Honey Bees have up to 100,000 bees per colony. But they also have daughter queens, setting up home on the same tree or building and you see multi-colony groups.

When you look close up, the *Apis dorsata* honey bee doesn't look similar to our bee. It is about 3cm long. The abdomen looks very long and the smoke coloured wings seem wrong. The bees change colour with age. They emerge as orange with the nurse being mostly orange, while forager bees are black with one orange segment.

When disturbed, the bees move as one and ripple like a Mexican wave, resulting in a flash of orange moving across the surface of the colony to warn predators away. As well as being big, they are more aggressive – they have, perhaps 100 times more guard bees defending the nest compared to *Apis mellifera*.

You don't want to annoy them!!! They do have *Varroa jacobsoni* and *Tropilaelaps clarea*, but brood cycle is shorter so the mite build-up is slower. Worker bees are as brood for 19 days, not 21; the queen emerges in 13 or 14 days; drones emerge in 22 days. They also have other peculiarities. Drones are reared in worker brood cells, but the drone brood does not have high domed



Topilaelaps on emerging drone.



Drone and worker larvae.

cappings. Drones are therefore the same in length to workers, but have large eyes, a longer thorax and a consequently shorter abdomen.

Each year the *Apis dorsata* colony in spring produces up to 30 queen cells from which four or five viable virgin queens are produced. The queens are almost identical to length workers, but with thick thorax and abdomen and no pollen corbiculae. The prime swarm goes off with old queen and half the bees set up home on a nearby branch. The remaining bees cannot cover the single comb.

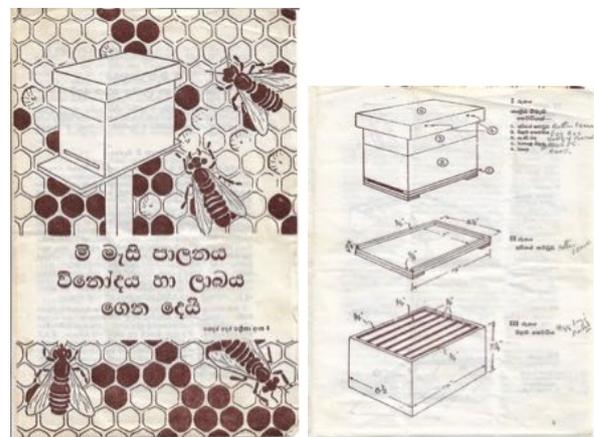
The virgin castes issue and they build nests on adjacent branches, The virgin *Apis dorsata* queens mate with 60 drones on average, perhaps as many as 100. The colonies do store honey, but do not overwinter. They use the honey to migrate from the lowlands in summer to the cooler uplands. They have specific migratory



Recent swarmed colony cannot cover comb.



Apis ceranae, slight thicker in abdomen than *Apis mellifera*.



Apis ceranae pamphlet.

rest trees on their way to the uplands to the same nest site each migration. The honeybees return after the lowland heat and summer dearth to the nests in the tree of they left the previous spring. The queens return to the last nest that they occupied. But the prime swarm queen, who now has the largest colony, can usurp the final virgin's colony as that colony – being the last caste and the last to mate – is normally the smallest colony, because it could have started with a queen and less than 500 bees. The forage of coconut tree nectar and pollen can be so plentiful that a virgin queen and 200 worker caste can survive.



Absolutely wonderful holiday at an old tea planter's bungalow.



Trincomalee Beach

In the uplands around Hatton I also saw the Indian Asian honeybee *Apis ceranae indica* and without a close examination they looked like any European honey bee.

Our driver did find me a pamphlet on *Apis ceranae* bee-keeping in Sri Lanka but it was in Ceylonese. The pamphlet does however show the size of the *Apis ceranae* hives. The hives are very much smaller than our National hives we use for *Apis mellifera*, so the honey yield per colony is very low, at four to six pounds. That is because the bees forage in quite a small area and will migrate the whole colony 1000 yards to new forage rather than collect forage at that distance. You find empty hives all around the production hive, just waiting for the Asian honeybees to migrate. The *Apis ceranae* bees have a shorter brood period compared to our *Apis mellifera* of similar duration to *Apis dorsata* and though they have the Varroa mite they are *Varroa jacobsoni* not our *Varroa destructor* and the Varroa can't breed on worker brood and must find drone brood Their common sudden abscond migrations leaving brood also helps to stop Varroa and other mite *Tropilaelaps clarea* taking hold.

I did do other things while on holiday – just as we all would do – mainly at this wonderful tea planter's bungalow in 1930 elegance and luxury.

Facebook (In)digest(ion)

Some of the highlights – and possibly lowlights – from LBKA's public facing Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/groups/2512721609/>

Eugene Fahy
LBKA Member

Geordy Mark did some calculations on the amount of nectar collected by honeybees in London. He estimates that the 6200 managed colonies and various feral colonies are collecting enough nectar to fill an Olympic size pool each year. He also posted a link to a Guardian story about satellite mapping showing the top ten greenest cities in Britain; London was ranked fifth greenest at <https://www.theguardian.com/cities/gallery/2017/jan/05/green-space-uk-largest-cities-mapped>.

There were various reports of bees collecting pollen throughout December, mahonia was the most popular source but gorse, cyclamen and winter flowering cherry were also mentioned. Following the NBU notification about feeding, Jon Monnick asked for opinions on the need to feed fondant. The views expressed suggested that the notifications should be seen as a prompt to check our hives and only to feed if necessary.

Geordy Mark and Tristram Sutton visited Ferrels in Paddington and did a presentation to architects and urban planners, encouraging them to consider pollinator habitat when planning new urban developments. Angela Wood shared a link to an FoE list of conventional farmers who have committed to producing rapeseed oil without using neonics.

Angela Wood shared a link to New Nature Magazine, a new publication where all the articles are written by people under the age of thirty. The first edition includes articles on how birds tell the time, Brexit and conservation and an interview with Chris Packham. See <https://www.newnature.co.uk/>.

Most of the other posts were, in one way or another, related to varroa. There was discussion of oxalic acid treatment and enquiries to see if anyone had done inspections and found brood. Despite the mild weather and flying bees returning with pollen, most responses were that colonies were brood free by mid-month. Karin Alton posted a link to a LASI video on YouTube on how to apply oxalic acid by sublimation, she also shared a link to a news item on Penn State University research showing that pollution has an impact on bees' ability to forage. See <http://news.psu.edu/story/416642/2016/07/06/research/bees-ability-forage-decreases-air-pollution-increases>.

Frank Ryan posted a query on mite kill. Having treated a colony with Apiguard in August, there was a zero drop by day 28 but following an oxalic acid dribble in December, the count a day later was 100. Opinion about the efficacy of Apiguard was mixed but the consensus seems to be that at best it does not work as well as other treatments. Geordy Mark suggested that varroa are far less likely to develop resistance to oxalic acid than to synthetic treatments as it causes physical damage which kills the mites whereas synthetic treatments attack their nervous system.

There was a link to a report by journalist and beekeeper Martha Kearney on researchers in Crete who are investigating fleabane (*Innula viscosa*) as a varroacide. See <http://bbc.in/2i66ETf>. The report on World at One mentioned a forthcoming programme where Martha examines the issue in more detail but the details are not on the clip on the web page. If anyone spots the programme details, perhaps they could post a link on the Facebook page.

Adventures in Beeland: Festive feast & Api-Bioxal time

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

Emily Scott
LBKA member

Wine!

There was a surprise treat for Ealing beekeepers this weekend – Pat had brought us some mulled wine, which he heated up and dished out to eager takers. He gleefully told us that, unlike most recipes, his doesn't involve burning off most of the alcohol (he followed Felicity Cloake's 'How to make perfect mulled wine' method).

We also had a bit of a feast to go with the wine – mince pies, baguette, cheese and cake. Well it is Christmas. The bees huddle up and eat and so do we.

Api-Bioxal

With this warming fuel in our bellies we even managed to do a bit of beekeeping. In the association apiary hives are given a one-off anti-varroa treatment of oxalic acid around December/January time. Those of you outside the UK may not know that UK beekeepers can



Pat with his mulled wine



Festive Christmas feast

no longer legally use generic oxalic acid crystals and should use Api-Bioxal, a Veterinary Medicines Directorate approved product containing oxalic acid, instead. Of course you can still buy oxalic acid crystals, which are cheaper than Api-Bioxal, but you would technically be breaking the law if you used them for anything other than 'hive cleansing'. Would anyone find out... probably not... but in an association apiary things need to be done by the book, so on Saturday we trickled Api-Bioxal on the bees.

I'm happy to say that both our hives were bursting with bees. They were not in a tight cluster and the day was warm enough that some colonies were flying. It's a quick job to trickle 5ml of the Api-Bioxal syrup mix over each seam of bees. They were gentle on us and the most difficult part was closing up afterwards without squashing any. The National Bee Unit estimates it should have a 90-95% efficiency rate – you can never get all the mites but you can get a satisfying number.



Api-Bioxal drizzling

Bee Music

Exciting news for bee music lovers – on Wednesday 21st at 10am BBC 6 Music have a bee-themed show, as BE will be performing their 2016 album ONE, which was created for the Hive installation at Kew Gardens using a live feed of bee colony sounds. If you can't listen live you can catch up with it afterwards.

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.

Giovanni Zintu: I'm looking for a honey frame display case or box if anybody has one to borrow, rent or sell if at a good price. This is to be used for a display at a market stall. I'm looking for a size that will fit either a super or brood frame. Or does anyone have a suggestion on where to obtain one apart from buying from Thorne?

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.

Readers' Letters

Our second ever Readers' Letter.

Reader Letter

Dear editor,

Thank you for yet another packed and informative newsletter. I particularly enjoyed Mark Patterson's astonishingly detailed 'Bees at Christmas' article. However I have one bone to pick with it (or should it be 'nut').

He mentions roast chestnuts as surely one of the classic signs of Christmas and I couldn't agree more – I love them! But these are Sweet Chestnuts, (in French from a Chataigne tree, excuse my spelling and probably not entirely correct) rather than what we in English call the Horse Chestnut tree. I know that it is the Horse Chestnut flower (reddish pink and white) that changes colour once it is pollinated, but the flower of the Sweet Chestnut is altogether different in colour (a sort of yellowy?) and shape, and I wonder if he really means that the Sweet Chestnut also changes colour, or is he referring to Horse Chestnuts?

Picky me.

Yours sincerely,
Sally Haywill.

Response

Good point Sally!

Yes I realised that after I wrote it that sweet chestnut have a long spike of tiny cream flowers. Horse, Italian and Chinese chestnut have candelabra type inflorescens which do change colour.

Mark Patterson.

Upcoming events

Sunday 12th February: Monthly meeting: Pollen identification

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

A hands-on practical session with microscopes and camera on how to identify pollen. Bring some pollen! 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. We are:

- **Chair:** Richard Glassborow, chair@lbka.org.uk
- **Treasurer:** David Hankins, treasurer@lbka.org.uk
- **Secretary:** Natalie Cotton, 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
- **Resources:** Tristram Sutton, resources@lbka.org.uk
- **Apiaries:** Vlad Zamfir, apiaries@lbka.org.uk
- **Emma:** Emma Nye, emma.nye@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Elliot Hodges, mentoring@lbka.org.uk

Our website is <http://www.lbka.org.uk/> and the pictures are in the same order as the names above.

