



# The London Beekeepers' Association

# LBKA News

## May, 2017

Welcome to May's newsletter! We've just finished running our full beekeeping courses, so we welcome 60 more potential beekeepers, some of whom have written up their experiences on page 7.

May is a busy time of year, though the cold weather has held back swarming. . . until the next warm day. The are more things for sale on page 12. Experienced members may be interested in receiving swarms, please see our "Members who want bees" page. Howard reminds us about dealing with rapidly expanding hive on page 4, Vlad and Ted update us on a couple of LBKA's apiaries, Eugene gives us a roundup of what's been happening on our open Facebook page on page 10. Martin has a dilemma that he'd like some opinions on, on page 9. And Emily shows us a shook swarm on page 11.

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Thanks to this month's contributors: **Deborah Blythe, Eugene Fahy, Richard Glassborow, Martin Hudson, Howard Nichols, Brian Kealy, Mark Patterson, Ted Parkes, Emily Scott, Rachel Taylor and Vlad Zamfir.** Thanks as usual to Martin Hudson for proof-reading it.

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

*Aidan Slingsby*  
Editor, [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk)

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## From our Chair

*Richard Glassborow*  
[chair@lbka.org.uk](mailto:chair@lbka.org.uk)

I would like to welcome this year's cohort of new members who have joined the LBKA by taking part in our Introduction to Beekeeping course, of which the second this year took part at St Paul's Church Hall in Clapham last weekend. I hope that you all enjoyed the course and will go on to enjoy delving further into this other world as you gain more knowledge and develop practical hands-on skills and experience of the craft of beekeeping with our team of mentors.

We hope too that you will find the LBKA an open



*Flowering broad beans in East Finchley. A bumblebee favourite.*

and welcoming group, always willing to help each other. How much individuals choose to get involved with the Association is of course up to them; there is no pressure.

But as we welcome new members I would like to take the opportunity to draw attention to, and remind our longer standing members of, what the LBKA is, what it does and how it works.

The core offer of the LBKA basically comes down to promoting and facilitating high standards of urban beekeeping; facilitating a beekeeping support network amongst the membership; helping London's bees; raising (evidence based) public awareness of bees and their role and needs in the environment.

These goals are implemented through a year long programme of regular monthly meetings with a seasonally relevant theme (second Sunday of every month); events, such as forage planting; shows, where we meet the public and members can sell products of their hives; winter lectures; a microscopy course; bee health day (pest and disease awareness and control); preparation for BBKA qualifications; school visits; responding to public, corporate and media enquiries and providing consultation services to parties interested in helping bees. Last but not least, the Association is a forum of mutual beekeeping support for members. I don't think I have ever met a beekeeper who does not enjoy sharing and discussing their experiences.

Getting to know and keeping track of all this can be bewildering, especially to newcomers and for this we rely heavily on members consulting and using the main platforms of communication: the [website](#); this Newsletter; Facebook (there are two, the members only [LBKA-forum](#) for internal discussion; the open Facebook [London Beekeepers Association](#) which has over 2,300 followers, including overseas). **All important information is on the website, will circulate by email or in the Newsletter** (circulated by email), so don't worry if you don't "do" social media. Really critical communications are sometimes used in addition and of course, members may also communicate with the trustees and committee. All these are the main channels used by the committee and trustees to communicate with the membership (but the committee cannot make members read them). See the list of committee members at the end of this newsletter.

At the risk of repeating myself I will not miss this opportunity to remind old and new that everything the Association does is carried out by volunteers. Thanks in large part to Emily Abbot, our Events Officer, who recruits and organises volunteers, we are steadily building an increasing number of team members willing and able to contribute to our agenda. This enables us to do more and to do it more efficiently. It should also help make our association more sustainable if the workload is shared more widely.

It can be hard work but I think it is fair to say, some of the things we do are right up there when it comes

to feel-good-factor. If anyone not already involved in delivering our programme has even the slightest interest or curiosity in doing so, or thinks they may have skills and or experience that may be relevant, please come and talk to any of the trustees/committee members, or drop us an email.

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## 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

This month's Monthly Meeting is replaced with our **Bee Health Day at Walworth Garden** (206 Manor Pl, Braganza St, SE17 3BN; note the different venue to usual) on **14th May**. Mark, Howard and Richard will talk about recognising, mitigating against and clearing up after bee diseases. It will include a hive inspection.

Due to limited space, **only people who've signed up can come this month.** We're limited to **20 people** for each session, please don't sign up exceed this number. If you can swap to the afternoon, that could be helpful – click on the pen icon next to your name to edit. Please bring your bee suit if you have one, but we'll also supply some.

Next month, on Sunday 11th June, we'll be at our usual venue for a **new** Monthly Meeting topic – making up nuclei – run by our education officer, Howard Nichols.

### LBKA swarm collection policy

Now we're right in the middle of the swarming season, a reminder on how LBKA is managing swarms this year.

Swarm collection is a voluntary public service. In previous years we have tried to follow best practice and take collected swarms to a dedicated quarantine apiary where their health and temperament can be assessed, treatment can be administered if necessary (principally for varroa), and then bring them on to BBKA nucleus standards for sale to members. However, the resources and logistics in a city the size of London make this difficult to achieve and expensive to run.

This year, the hybrid policy piloted last year remains in place.

- **Coordination.** Our Whatsapp group helps coordinate swarm collection. It is for all members interested in swarms – **collecting them, learning**

how to collect swarms, receiving swarms or just immersing yourself in the swarm chatter. Join this group from the "[members looking for bees](#)" page.

- **Recipients.** Swarm collectors arrange directly with beekeepers wanting to receive swarms for delivery or collection. These are members listed on our "[members looking for bees](#)" page – ask [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) to be added. We recommends that beginners don't take swarms.
- **Costs.** Swarms (as distinct from nucs) cannot be sold (as this invalidates insurance), however a flat rate to cover expenses of £20 is paid by the receiving party direct to the swarm collector.
- **Nucs.** A 'nuc' (short for 'nucleus') is like a mini-hive with 5-frames. This is the easiest way to receive bees. Swarm collectors can opt to produce nucs from the swarms they collect to BBKA's [nuc standards](#) for sale, keeping the proceeds. Again, our "[members looking for bees](#)" page lists members looking for a nuc.

In time, **LBKA would still like to find swarm apiaries across London and beekeepers to manage them**, This would make it easier for collectors from all over to bring swarms in and for receivers to collect. Let us know if you can help

It is also part of LBKA policy to **increase the number of swarm collectors**, including training new collectors. Beekeepers who would like to learn from more experienced collectors how to collect swarms can join the Whatsapp mentioned above to attend a call-out.

## Communicating with members

Just a reminder of the various ways we have to help members communicate with either other.

**Open Facebook group:** this is open to the (Facebook) world and has over 2000 members. A good place to get lots of beekeeping-related information and advice, but no promotion, advertising or selling is allowed.

**LBKA-forum group:** this a members-only Facebook group. This group is for anything to do with beekeeping or LBKA that you want to keep within the membership. You can also sell equipment, bees, honey or even invite people to your apiary. Note that only about a third of members have joined this group. If you're a member and don't have access, please ask [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) to add you.

**Members' area:** this is a password-protected part of the website.

- Check your details.
- If you are looking for bees, you can ask for your name to be added to the list.
- If you have bees to sell, you can use the list to find people
- See details of members' discounts
- For those who have opted into sharing your details with other members, you can find out who's local

to you and who's open to giving beekeeping help. Local beekeeping networks are really useful!

## Courses

We've now run both our full beekeeping courses for this year and have 60 people starting on their beekeeping journey. We welcome them, some of whom have already written up their experiences on page 7.

We are still looking for mentors – if you've kept bees for a couple of years, have your Bee Basic and would be able to have people accompany you on your colony inspections, please talk to Elliot Hodges at [mentoring@lbka.org.uk](mailto:mentoring@lbka.org.uk). Most mentors get a lot of satisfaction out of mentoring and our mentees benefit hugely. Our mentoring programme probably contributes to our 100% Bee Basic pass record!

## Old announcements from April

Check our [previous newsletters](#) or contact [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) for more details.

**Mentoring:** Mentoring season will be starting shortly. If you are interested in becoming a mentor please contact Elliot at [mentoring@lbka.org.uk](mailto:mentoring@lbka.org.uk). Full support provided.

**Survey of UK beekeepers:** [https://ljmbusiness.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_b1RNZbOdqJBL7xP](https://ljmbusiness.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_b1RNZbOdqJBL7xP).

**Do you want bees?** Sign up on up [http://lbka.org.uk/swarm\\_list.html](http://lbka.org.uk/swarm_list.html).

**Collecting swarms:** Email [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) if you'd like to be added/removed to our WhatsApp list

**Guest blog?** Does any other member have a blog that they would like to feature here? Let me know on [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk)

## Old announcements from March

**Beekeeper wanted:** A Community Garden in Fulham are looking for a beekeeper to look after their two hives. Contact [admin@lbka.org.uk](mailto:admin@lbka.org.uk) if you can help.

**New leaflets:** LBKA has two new leaflets, one on the types of bees found in London and one on how to help honey bees. They are available for [free download](#) and we can supply printed copies for public outreach activities.

**Engraved hive tool:** We presented Howard with a hive tool to commemorate his achievement of becoming a Master Beekeeper.

**Surrey Shield:** LBKA has been awarded the Surrey Shield for outstanding performance in the 2016 BBKA Basic assessments. Last year we had the highest number of members as a proportion of membership passing this assessment.

## Old announcements from February

**Howard is a Master Beekeeper**, the highest of the BBKA qualifications.

### Do you have any announcements?

If you've any announcements for the next issue of LBKA News, please send to Aidan at [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk).

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## Out and About

As we are now a charity, we expect to be doing more outreach activities. Here, we summarise what LBKA members have been doing in this regard. Please let us know if you want to get involved in some of these activities on behalf of LBKA. We can give advice, let you know about opportunities, perhaps some training and may even be able lend you props.

We can only report things if we know about them, so please send your activities to [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk).

Only one this month: Tristram was talking to the Metro about urban bees in London: see the [article](#) and [video](#).

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## Last month's Monthly Meeting: Nosema

What happened last month.

Last month's monthly meeting was led by Howard and Richard and enables members to use microscopy techniques to diagnose Nosema in their bees.

I wasn't able to find anyone to write it up – if you've like to volunteer to write up some of our monthly meetings in future, please contact [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk).

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## May in the Apiary

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

*Howard Nichols*  
[education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk)

May is all about swarm control. Because of this it is a busy month for the beekeeper but also an exciting month. Daylight hours are continuing to increase, a continual supply of new flowers is emerging and healthy bee colonies are expanding. Due to the earlier good weather a lot of colonies have already attempted to swarm in April.

For colonies which have not yet swarmed or attempted to swarm then detailed inspections should be made each 7 days to check for queen cells. If 2 brood boxes are used (brood and a half or double brood) then the bees often build some of their queen cells between the 2 boxes. A simple routine check may be made by removing supers then lifting / tilting the upper chamber to inspect the bottom of the frames in the upper box. It is not necessary to remove the queen excluder or all frames using this quick method although it is not foolproof. The only way to be entirely sure is to remove each frame then carefully and systematically inspect each one. Even then a queen cell hidden behind bees may be missed.

### Signs of swarming

Swarm control action is only needed when 1 or more queen cells are seen. Build up of drones or drone brood is not a sign of swarm preparations. Neither is the building of queen cups unless containing larva and royal jelly. However, either of these events should put us on "amber alert".

### Action to be taken

Quick but not immediate action is required. Do not feel intimidated into taking immediate action. There is time to close up the colony, think matters through and collate necessary equipment. Do not attempt to destroy the queen cell, as this will not remove the swarming impulse. Best solution is Artificial Swarm method but this does depend upon finding the queen. This was the topic at the March LBKA monthly meeting. Most beekeeping textbooks cover this method.

### What if the queen is not marked?

If the queen is unmarked or you simply cannot find her then shook swarm is the sensible option. A spare brood box and queen excluder are needed. It is disruptive for

the bees but not harmful. Again, textbooks cover this method.

## Other actions to be taken this month

**Brood disease inspection.** A specific brood disease inspection should be carried out if not already done in April. This should involve shaking all the bees from each brood frame, one frame at a time, into the bottom of the hive and carefully checking each brood frame for signs of abnormality. As with any disease or pathogen, the sooner it is detected and a course of rectification commenced then the more the likelihood of a successful outcome.

**Add supers.** Add supers as necessary, adding another in advance of it being needed by the bees. A super may be required either below the queen excluder or above it.

**Draw frames.** Use May nectar flow to draw out some foundation into drawn frames.

**Varroa.** Check varroa mite drop if not done in April.

**Equipment.** Make sure you have sufficient spare equipment for swarm control. This includes having either spare drawn comb or made up frames with foundation.

**Enjoy!** Most of all – enjoy your May month of bee-keeping!

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## Focus on Forage

Mark's tells us what's in flower at this time of year. Since Mark's been busy this month, I've used the article he wrote last year.

Mark Patterson  
[forage@lbka.org.uk](mailto:forage@lbka.org.uk)

Plants important to bees this month include **Horse Chestnut** (dark red pollen), **Sycamore** (pale yellow pollen), Sorbus trees such as white beam and **Mountain Ash** (pictured), **Bird Cherry** (pictured) and **Elder**. In parks, gardens and municipal areas **Choisya**, **Cotoneaster**, **Ceanothus** and **prunus laurocerasus** 'lunken' are all shrubs visited by bees.

Herbaceous perennial plants important to bees this month include **Dandelions** which are coming to the end of their main flowering period in London, **Green Alkanet** (pictured; now at its peak), **Forget-me-nots** and **Spanish Blue bells** with their green-blue pollen.



*Rowan blooms.*



*Ceanothus up close.*

Starting to make an appearance are the first of the summer flowers which will become much more important later in the season when the trees have ceased blooming. These include **Scabious**, **Knapweeds**, **Centurea**, **Valerian**, **thistles**, **milkweeds** and the simple flower of **umbellifers** and composite flowers.

Right now in my garden the bees are visiting my **Bowles mauve wall flowers**, **apple blossom**, **Pulmonaria** and **strawberries**.

As we transition from spring into early summer the flowers change guard and so do the wild bees.

Many of the early emerging solitary bees will by now have built nests, provisioned for their offspring and are beginning to die. Their offspring will emerge next



Honey bees visiting my apples.



Bird cherry.

March to begin the cycle again. Some are bivoltaine meaning they have a second generation later in the summer but for many including the hairy footed flower bees their time for this season is coming to an end, the makes now bleached grey by the sun instead of their fresh gingery blonde.

As the early *Andrena* bees and flower bees disappear, a new batch of pollinators will take over, equipped to forage on a different set of later emerging plants. Soon we'll see the yellow faced bees, wool carder bees and leaf cutters visiting the flowers in our gardens.

### Jobs to do in the garden

- Dead head spring flowering bulbs



Green alkanet.

- Plant out non hardy plants such as **tomato, runner beans, cucurbits and peppers.**
- Continuous weeding
- Water if dry
- Sow biennials now to ensure you have flowering plants for next spring. These include **foxglove, honesty and echiums.**

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## LBKA Apiaries

News from LBKA's apiaries.

### Mudchute

Vlad Zamfir  
 LBKA Apiary Manager  
[apaires@lbka.org.uk](mailto:apaires@lbka.org.uk)

In April, the Mudchute apiary expanded to three colonies as a swarm was housed in one of the empty hives and the only queen-right colony was artificially swarmed. Sadly, the queenless colony failed in raising a new mated queen (the queen cell hatched but there was no sign of the queen in the colony) so I had to unite the remaining bees with the small artificial swarm. It's possible that warm/cold weather cycles played a part in this. The swarm mentioned above was brought in

by our Chair and they managed to fill up a whole National brood chamber. They had drawn out 5 frames of foundation in a day and the queen had even laid eggs in some of the cells.

All three colonies now have at least 1 super on them and are making good progress in filling them out. Fingers crossed the weather becomes and stays better.

Vlad Zamfir and Ted Parkes  
[apaires@lbka.org.uk](mailto:apaires@lbka.org.uk)

## Holland Park

Ted Parkes  
 Apiary Manager (Holland Park)

As spring slowly moves along, the colonies at Holland Park are growing. However, like the weather so far the hives are a real mix: a little of everything and a reminder on how quickly things can change.

Of the 5 hives, 4 plus a swarm, one is very strong. It has doubled in size with the addition of a second brood box as well as a honey super and it's still threatening to swarm. Keeping a close eye on that one. A second hive is progressing nicely and is well under control with the first honey super on to ensure they have lots of room. The two other hives that survived winter continue to struggle. One has been queenless since first inspection and I introduced a queen cell a week ago. The 4th hive that seemed to have come through winter fine all of a sudden had a drone laying queen. I also introduced a queen cell to that hive. So now time will tell. I will leave them alone for an extra week before disturbing them and hope a new queen has emerged and mated. It could take a full 2 weeks before seeing any signs of a new mated queen. The swarm captured last month is progressing and will soon be moved into a full size brood box.

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## April Beekeeping Course

Last month, we ran our first weekend beekeeping course of the year. Three attendees – Brian, Rachel and Deborah – have kindly written up their experiences from the weekend.

### Saturday

Brian Kealy

By way of a very quick introduction, I live in SE London, and have wanted to keep bees for many years. I



A picture of Brian's existing hive and "the closet thing [he] has to a bee" at the moment.

have put off actually doing so on a regular basis, but I felt that the time had come.

Inevitably I was always destined to do things in an illogical manner. I was sent details of Thornes sale last November, and jumped gleefully into the abyss and purchased a lovely Bee keepers starter kit and put a deposit on a Nuc of Bees. I have read several books on the subject of keeping 60,000 wild insects in a box in your garden, including the Idiots guide to beekeeping, something that I would soon come to assume was pretty apt. The course, with its intended mentoring scheme, was clearly something considered and rational in an otherwise rather ill prepared sequence of events. Having been a member of the Facebook pages, and having read the newsletters and notices I was aware of the huge breadth of knowledge that was available to me by my membership, and was really looking forward to being immersed in Bee wisdom.

The day started with a warm and friendly welcome, a much-needed coffee and a biscuit. Like any gathering of a group of people who although sharing a common passion are from many areas and circumstances, and I was keen to see how the group would develop, with a promise to myself to try and not say anything daft or outrageous.

The course kicked off with an introduction to what we will be dealing with. The Bee. Its origins, physical characteristics, other insects that we may think are honey bees, bees' evolution and the way the colony works as a single entity. I am sure that those that have been



*Rachel building a frame on the first day.*

around bees are fully aware of this, but as a novice, and even having read about it, the way this was explained really bought home the amazing thing that is the colony, and the almost dark art that enables it to behave as a single organism. Quite an amazing thing to get your head round.

The course moved on after refreshments, to keeping your bees fed and watered, what the constituent parts of the flower do what, and what the bees need you to provide for them in your garden. We then had a wonderful presentation from people who took the course last year, and their experience in their first year. This very insightful view of the multitude of things that can go wrong no matter how much you think you are prepared, how to keep your head when things around you are doing wrong... and the value of being part of LBKA.

After Lunch, we went off to see a nearby apiary, and were shown various very important things about inspecting a colony, what to look for, what not to do, and how to not annoy the bees or Beekeeper. This was followed by being let loose with a hammer, and some frame constituent parts, in the optimistic view that given enough pieces of a frame, eventually I would produce something of close similarity to a decent frame.

## Sunday

*Rachel Taylor*

The second day of the course began with the part that most people were keen to know more about – swarming! Why it happened, how to prevent it and collecting swarms. The explanation that swarming is an entirely

natural process to ensure the procreation of the hive made perfect sense as to why there will always be a drive to swarm.

Next though came the session with a more worrying tone – diseases and, in particular, the Varroa mite. An ugly insight to learn how the mites have spread into the UK and how aggressive the mites are – especially when you realise that it's the equivalent of having something the size of a dinner plate sitting on your chest! Accepting Varroa-control as a part of beekeeping is essential good practice though and it was good to spend some time getting more detail on how to go about that.

Other topics that we looked at included a practical demonstration of honey extraction from super frames (sticky!), a walk-through of the beekeeper's year (no holidays in springtime!) and how to get started with beekeeping (our bible for the next year).

We continued the pattern of the previous day with visits to a different set of hives from the day before – captivating to see the bees close up again and get to handle the frames again. We alternated the visit to the hives with a walkthrough of the equipment that is needed for beekeeping – one lesson learnt is that you should take advice before buying most things otherwise you will end up with a large collection of things that you might never use.

Our final treat of the day was to taste five or six different honeys, one of which came from the hives in the Eden Community Garden, right next door to the church. It's not often that you get to taste different honeys one after the other and the taste differential was impressive; I don't know if it was newly acquired loyalty but the Eden honey was a definite stand-out winner!

Our walk home that afternoon was punctuated with frequent stops to watch bees as they went about their business on different flowers and bushes – we were filled with a newfound respect for the hard work and intelligence of these fascinating creatures and eager to keep on learning.

All in all, a hugely rewarding and informative course – well structured, knowledgeably presented and hugely entertaining. The presenters and contributors were all engaging, warm and approachable – an invaluable and enjoyable way of learning.

## Deborah's perspective

*Deborah Blythe*

At the time I signed up for the course I considered myself an armchair bee enthusiast. I decided to attend to try and get a better understanding about how the theory of beekeeping works in practice. I was far too daunted to see myself ever keeping bees and supposed that the course would reinforce that belief. I could not have been more wrong!

From the moment I walked into the grounds of St Paul's Church where the course was held, and watched and learned from the beekeepers in the secluded apiaries of the church and local gardens, I realised that maybe I was wrong and it might just be possible.

Seeds of confidence started to form. The words from the chairman in the opening session that most people attending will be put off becoming a beekeeper fuelled my doubts but they started to recede as each of the speakers gave their talk. They were all so enthusiastic and passionate about bees. The morning sessions went by in a flash due mainly to the enthusiasm and energy of the speakers. Their love of the subject was obvious and very infectious. They are a very friendly bunch and approachable and readily shared their beekeeping mishaps with us. So rather than go out for lunch I spent it so enrapt by a wonderful video of honey bees at work as well as chatting to a number of very friendly delegates and hearing about their involvement with bees.

The afternoon was predominantly a practical session and we split up into groups to inspect the hives located in the grounds and a private garden nearby.

The last session was great fun. It was like something out of the generation game. After observing how to assemble frames for supers and brood we were then provided with all the tools and materials and told to get on and build our own frames – great way to get everyone buzzing.

Sunday came and the sessions flashed by with talks in the morning about swarms and another wonderful practical session with a beekeeper and her bees in a Clapham Garden near to the course. With such an idyllic garden it was easy to see why her bees were so chilled even when their frames were being inspected by us novices. The course came to an end all too soon. Before we all left we were treated to a honey tasting session before we were handed the latest edition of the BBKA manual.

The course has transformed my thought process. I have decided to get out of my armchair and make a beeline towards keeping bees. I will take with me the words of wisdom spoken by our speakers;

- Damp kills bees not the cold.
- Bees need forage so plant bee friendly plants wherever you can even if you can only do it on a small scale.
- Join your local bee association.

## Final words from Brian

*Brian Kealy*

In summing up, I thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of the course. One could not help but be impressed by the knowledge, passion and sheer dedication of the people who presented and put the course together. I rather like that there were many Red Flags set out, with a plethora of warnings about commitment, time spent,



*Martin's lovely queen. Photo: Eric Gaffney 2017*

and things that will bite you. The completely different experiences conveyed by the presenters was both insightful and thought provoking. The balance of enthusiasm and coaching with considered warnings was about right. The phrase used was that were many filters put in your way to see if this was the hobby for you. Some have already taken the plunge, but the sensible ones will have a year of filtering to see if this is for them. I was also reassured in my choice of membership by the rest of the group. Beekeeping is for people that care about the world we live in and how we treat it, I may be naïve but that is my impression. Bees' success depends on the Beekeeper having a holistic view of their surroundings and hopefully an understanding of the complexity and often unpredictability of the colony. Thank you to those that gave their time, knowledge, humour and fear of god into my day.

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## Shook Swarm, Split or Artificial Swarm?

Can anyone help Martin with his dilemma?

*Martin Hudson*  
LBKA Member

I had a very healthy single colony on an allotment site in High Barnet going into the winter. They were in a single (standard National) brood box, but I left two supers of honey for them (without the queen excluder) throughout the winter, and they came through well – with the centre of the brood nest in the lower of the two supers and honey stored above it, and two outer frames of dirty untouched feed (from last autumn, I think) in the brood box. I had not treated them with oxalic acid in December, because I had not seen much sign of varroa, and prefer not to stress (or damage) my

girls with severe acids, if I can avoid it. (Contentious point number one, I guess.)

My lovely queen (see above pic) is now nearly two years old, and there was no attempt to swarm last year. I was ready to expand to two colonies last year, but as they did not attempt to swarm, I left them as a single colony, and took 60 kg of honey in May and August last year.

When I started inspecting at the end of March, they were expanding well, but the brood comb (now nearly two years old) was very dirty, so I thought about doing a shook swarm to replace the comb. Despite their rapid expansion, the weather was not consistently warm in early April, so I decided initially to add a second brood box (of foundation – I had no spare drawn comb), with the intention of “shook swarming” the older brood box once she had started laying in the new box. When I inspected last Friday, she had started laying in the new comb in the top box – so far so good! When both brood boxes were on freshly drawn comb being laid in throughout by the Queen, I planned to split the double brood colony into two single brood boxes later in the season, forcing them to create a second queen in the then new queenless colony.

In the meantime, if the new double brood colony shows any signs of swarming (nothing so far this year), I planned to do an artificial swarm, putting two viable open queen cells (or should it be one?) into the second colony on the new site with lots of brood. My problem with this is that I will already probably have loads of brood in both brood boxes, so will I need to have a third brood box (mostly foundation) into which to place the old queen and the foragers? Could I then restrict the new queen to one brood box on the new site, so that I end up with a spare brood box of drawn comb?

I also thought that I would make a decision towards the end of this season whether to also replace my lovely old (blue) queen in the original colony. That would depend, I think on how well she is doing. Right?

I would be interested in feedback from LBKA members as to whether these plans make sense, and/or whether I have missed any important factors. I am aware that my plan will not eradicate varroa as thoroughly as changing all of the brood comb at the same time (a shook swarm), but I suppose I am planning a sort of Bailey comb change, leaving the colony with some brood to concentrate on while I am replacing the other half. I certainly plan to use Apiguard after the summer crop (if any) is removed in early August, but I would be most interested if anyone has any words of wisdom about my plans!

I fully expect to get at least 2,001 different answers – probably more – since I am asking 2,000 LBKA beekeepers what their opinions are on these plans! Anyway – thanks in advance!

## Facebook (In)digest(ion)

*Some of the highlights from LBKA's [public facing Facebook page](#).*

*Eugene Fahy  
LBKA Member*

April seemed to have been a quieter month on the Facebook page, possibly because people were busy with their bees. Certainly, there were reports of swarm calls very early in the month.

Angela Woods was a prolific contributor this month. She [shared a post](#) from Brigit Strawbridge, “In defence of the dandelion” which attracted over one hundred comments. Although the dandelion has a starring role in adverts for Roundup weekkiller, the article highlights the many benefits of *Taraxacum officinale*. As well as being a source of nectar and pollen, it is a salad ingredient rich in antioxidants, a coffee substitute and a diuretic – the latter use giving rise to its common French name “pissenlit”.

Angela also [posted a link](#) to a New Scientist article “Gene editing opens doors to seedless fruit with no need for bees”. Researches at Tokushima University in Japan, introduced a mutation to tomatoes which increases levels of a hormone called auxin which causes fruits to develop even though no seeds have formed.

Finally there was [a report](#) of a Swiss Court decision, rejecting an appeal from a man convicted of involuntary manslaughter after wasps from a nest he was removing from a balcony, stung a neighbour who then died. The court heard that, even though it was cold and wet, it was nevertheless reasonably foreseeable that the neighbour would be on the balcony. The case sets no precedent in UK law but it highlights the importance of BBKA and LBKA guidance on public safety around our apiaries and when collecting swarms.

Apart from the usual visiting overseas beekeepers wanting to meet kindred spirits and people looking for local honey, we had a number of posts were from people wanting to make contact with London beekeepers. Marijn Maas, a student at the London Film School is producing a short film about a young girl fascinated by insects. She posted a request for help on filming some scenes in the film which involved collecting honey. Her contact details are [marijn.maas@ifs-students.org.uk](mailto:marijn.maas@ifs-students.org.uk).

Terry Tibbs a reporter for a media agency is interested in speaking to anyone who uses apitherapy to treat an illness: [shannon.lane@barcroftmedia.com](mailto:shannon.lane@barcroftmedia.com). Finally, Lorna Mills and her husband, who are [photographers and filmmakers](#) were visiting London in early May

and wanted to take photos of urban beekeepers tending their hives.

Catherine Giordano [shared a link](#), asking why do small scale beekeepers keep honey bees. Most of the reasons will be familiar: honey, money (although not necessarily for massive profit), helping the ecosystem but Cat mentions what she calls a "spiritual reward ? feeling a connection to a species as highly evolved as honey bees.

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## Adventures in Beeland: A Shook Swarm Demo

*Another guest post from Emily's excellent blog – <http://adventuresinbeeland.com/>. John Chapple is an LBKA and used to be LBKA's Chair – nice to see him back in the newsletter!*

*Emily Scott  
LBKA member*

On the Saturday before Easter a small but enthusiastic group of us gathered under the shade of the apiary's trees to watch John Chapple carry out a shook-swarm demo on one of the hives.

Unusually for John, he was actually wearing a veil. This was testimony to the reputation of the chosen bees as particularly curmudgeonly – "bad but prolific" was how John described them. In the end the bees were remarkably patient with us and I believe no-one got stung. Below are some photos showing John going about the process of shaking the bees off their old frames and into a fresh new hive of foundation.

A queen excluder is placed under the brood nest (but above the entrance) to stop the queen absconding. The colony is fed plenty of syrup to help them draw out the foundation and build fresh new comb. The old brood combs are burned, along with any varroa lurking inside the brood. Replacing old combs also helps reduce the chances of the bees getting nasty diseases like AFB and EFB. One of the requirements of keeping bees at the Ealing apiary is to do an annual comb change.

It's best to find the queen during a shook-swarm so that you can be sure she's been safely put in the new hive. John had just taken one frame out when Tom's sharp eyes spotted a magnificent dark queen running up the surface of the next comb. Although she had been marked last summer, she was now unmarked. Either her mark had worn off or the bees had replaced the original queen.



*Shaking the bees*



*John looking for the queen*



*The queen being captured in a cage before John marked her with a nice pink pen.*

## Capturing the queen

Pat commented that at the Middlesex conference in February one of the speakers suggested that the best way to find the queen is to take out a frame of brood and then immediately look at the surface of the next frame along. This queen had proved that!

I got a few short videos of the shook-swarmer process, here's some links to them:

- [John Chapple talks about looking for the queen](#) (23 seconds)
- [Capturing the queen in a cage](#) (8 seconds)
- [John shaking in a frame of bees](#) (4 seconds)

Someone on Twitter commented about the last video that: "he is shaking an empty frame of foundation with few bees on... pointless showing a shook procedure with no bees on frame. Waste of a video clip". I thought I'd share that here as fair warning before anyone wastes four seconds of their lives watching it! Good to know my videos have fans.

Official guidance on how to carry out a shook-swarm can be found on the [Beebase advisory leaflets page](#).

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## 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](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) to add something here.

**Alan Bezzant.** Available to a good home – a Dartington long hive complete with supers. Been used for last 5 years or so in Eden garden. In exchange for an appropriate donation to Bees for Development. Contact Alan on 07802 635007 or [alanb@mcs-europe.co.uk](mailto:alanb@mcs-europe.co.uk).

**Esben Hesketh.** I'm moving back to Denmark soon, so I need to find a new home for my two hives. They are lovely bees. I currently have two deep 12x14 national hives with individual hive stands and 6 supers. All the hives, stands and supers were purchased from Thorne in the last two years and are in great condition. I estimate that all the equipment cost me about £1,200 over the last two years, so I am looking for reasonable payment. I will even throw in two tray feeders and an extraction bucket in the deal. I am looking to sell everything in one go. The person who buys them has to be able to transport them from Higham Allotments in Tottenham. There's also a possibility of taking over my spot at the

allotment site. Contact me on [esben.hesketh@gmail.com](mailto:esben.hesketh@gmail.com) for more details.

**Carole Wright.** Can I ask that people let me know if they're doing a split of a large overwintered colony so I can buy their Nuc. Give me a call on 07885 221964 if you can help.

**Philippe Sigal.** I'm relocating to Lisbon in July and it is unlikely that I will have access to a garden or space where I could keep bees. As a result, I am selling the following items. Give me a call on 0776 6070 688 if you're interested. I'm in SW15.

- MidiMel: 4 frame tangential manual s/s extractor (Thorne product code = E1981) + 40kg Tank fitted with Valve (Thorne product code = T0003) Both bought a few months ago from Thorne and in mint condition (used twice). Price: £150 (reduced and negotiable).
- 2 x National Hive Complete with sloping hive stand, Happykeeper floor, Brood Box with 11 DN4 frames, Stainless Steel Wire framed Queen Excluder, 3 Supers each with 10 SN1 frames with castellated spacers and wired foundation, Crownboard with 2 plastic porter bee escapes, 4" roof (Thorne product code = N9991OM), Quick feeder, Hive tool, Smoker, 2 bee suits, 1 strong colony with a queen from last year, Bought and assembled 3 years ago. Price £550 (reduced and negotiable).

**Emily Abbott.** I've got loads of 30lb buckets that I need to shift! Happy to donate them to anyone who could use them. They're all buckets that I bought for honey, so they're food grade, I've given them a quick rinse, and have got writing on them so I'm definitely recycling them, rather than offering brand new buckets! [emilyabbott@virginmedia.com](mailto:emilyabbott@virginmedia.com).

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## Upcoming events

### Sunday 14th May: Monthly meeting: Bee health day

10:00-13:00 and 14:00-17:00 at Walworth Garden (206 Manor Place, Braganza St, SE17 3BN)

Our special Bee Health Day will see Mark, Howard and Richard talking about recognising and mitigating against bee diseases. It will include inspection of a hive and inspection of other comb. Due to the hands-on nature of the day, it is only open to [those who registered](#). We will run the same session in the morning and the afternoon and are limiting numbers to 20 per session, prioritising those who have bees. Members-only please.

## Sunday 11th June: Monthly meeting: Making up nuclei

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

All about making up nuclei. 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](mailto:chair@lbka.org.uk)
- **Treasurer:** David Hankins, [treasurer@lbka.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@lbka.org.uk)
- **Secretary:** Natalie Cotton, [admin@lbka.org.uk](mailto:admin@lbka.org.uk)
- **Education:** Howard Nichols [education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk)
- **Membership:** Aidan Slingsby, [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk)
- **Forage:** Mark Patterson, [forage@lbka.org.uk](mailto:forage@lbka.org.uk)
- **Events:** Emily Abbott, [events@lbka.org.uk](mailto:events@lbka.org.uk)
- **Resources:** Tristram Sutton, [resources@lbka.org.uk](mailto:resources@lbka.org.uk)
- **Apiaries:** Vlad Zamfir, [apiaries@lbka.org.uk](mailto:apiaries@lbka.org.uk)
- **Emma:** Emma Nye, [emma.nye@lbka.org.uk](mailto:emma.nye@lbka.org.uk)
- **Mentoring:** Elliot Hodges, [mentoring@lbka.org.uk](mailto:mentoring@lbka.org.uk)

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

