



LBKA News

February 2025

From The Chair

Text by Sharon Bassey

A new year and new committee members

For those of you who do not know me, I have been keeping bees for many years, I have kept bees in many places and worked with many organisations. I taught beekeeping in HMP Wandsworth for the Conservation Foundations 'Unlocking Nature' project and I still look after the bees in the Horniman Museum. I also look after my own bees in two local parks and two allotments. I also have access to a field in Kent. I am looking forward to beekeeping with you all over the coming season.

It gives me great pleasure to introduce some new committee members over the coming weeks, who are bringing in fresh ideas with renewed energy and being guided by our existing members who 'know the ropes'.

Our emphasis this year will be on better beekeeping through workshops and module study groups - just come and learn there will be no emphasis for you to sit exams but Howard (our Master Beekeeper) will go through the syllabus with you and hopefully you will go away having learnt something. If you then want to enter to take a module this can be arranged. As we all know you never stop learning. I would like to take this opportunity to invite people to take the Basic Assessment this year - this assessment is required if you wish to keep bees in a public space. Please see Howard to register your interest.

A new committee means some changes and we will have to start with the swarm list. The British Beekeeping Association (BBKA) recommends that we offer training to members who want to collect swarms so we will be offering a workshop and those attending will go onto the new swarm list. We have a duty of care to make sure members take adequate precautions if collecting swarms in the LBKA's name and to also keep members and members of the public safe too.

At the Annual Delegates Meeting this year it was voted that the BBKA's capitation will be going up by £2.00 but LBKA's will stay the same. The dates for the Spring Convention are 4th-6th April.

I look forward to meeting many of you over the coming season and catching up with those of you who I already know.

A very big Thank you to Aidan who has made the transition for us easier.

From The Committee

Have we met? Get to know the 2025 LBKA Committee Members by reading a short profile from each. Below a profile from Will, George, Dan, Tristram, Annie and Elaine written by themselves, with other committee members to follow suit in the next couple newsletters. The complete committee consists of the five individuals below as well as Howard Nichols (Education), Elliot Hodges (Mentoring), and Paul Youthed (Planting Strategist).

Treasurer : Will Bunker



“There are those born to beekeeping, some who acquire beekeeping, and others who have beekeeping thrust upon them” ... I think my introduction to this fascinating activity falls firmly in that last category, as a few years ago I had to rescue a hive from a friend who became really allergic to the stings and offered to 'look after it for a bit'.

Well, as we all know with beekeeping, it's never just like that! So here I am, now managing two apiaries in Clapham with four delightful colonies apiece in each. I'm lucky to have had the opportunity to introduce the bees to the Brownies and Guides that meet at the Trinity Hospice where I keep one set in their wonderful garden. Also, to be a part of the great community at the Landor Road allotments where the bees are treated as part of the family there.

I did my degree in Biological Sciences, but have followed a career in IT and business consultancy. However, my passion for the natural world still remains, and I find that beekeeping very much keeps 'my hand in' and allows for a much needed respite from the day-to-day grind. I always smile when on a packed underground train pulling out of Clapham North station that just above me there are my bees buzzing around, living in their totally different frame of existence.

I love being part of the LBKA, and wanted to support more of what they do and for the reasons for which they do it. I stood for the role of treasurer and trustee in the recent AGM, and hope to build on the great work that the association has done with its charitable endeavours over the years. I look forward to us all having a great beekeeping year ahead, and to offer up a full set of activities and events for all our members to enjoy!”

Member Communications : George Brown



“Hello fellow beekeepers and bee friends. My name is George, and I am delighted to join the LBKA committee. I live just a short distance from our Mudchute Farm apiary in London’s East End. My work in supply chain and data analytics means I spend a lot of time with spreadsheets being analytical and technical. Joining this beekeeping group ensures I step away from my desk for a few hours each week to enjoy the outdoors (at least when it’s not winter!). The first time I looked in a hive was in 2018, and I remain fascinated how so many bees go about their daily business, doing what they do best. Being in the presence of thousands of bees is incredibly therapeutic and has deepened my appreciation for nature and all its wonders. I look forward to contributing to our group and learning from you all.”

Social Media : Dan Wilkinson

"I'm Dan. After taking an introductory LBKA course last summer, I received mentorship under Sharon at her Southwark Park community apiary.

I've learnt the basics of hive inspections and marking queens etc. Meeting other beekeepers has also been a joy, with everyone having their own style and approach to every facet of keeping bees.

My new role is to help push the online social presence of the LBKA, making more members aware of our events and initiatives. I'd love to gather members' input on what we could cover or if they have any ideas for future posts. Please email dan.wilkinson@lbka.org.uk if you have any thoughts.

Very excited to help promote London Beekeeping!"

Apiaries : Tristram Sutton

"I am Tristram and have been a beekeeper for 12 years.

During this time I have kept my own bees and taught beekeeping to groups all over London. The LBKA has been at the centre of my beekeeping practice. Apart from anything else it introduced me to an inspirational mentor and a group of people with a shared passion despite their different personalities and approaches to the craft.

During my time with the LBKA I have managed the Mudchute apiary, the mentoring program, the association's resources and currently their apiaries as a whole. I also had the opportunity to re-draft LBKA's constitution and manage the process to secure its charitable status.

In beekeeping I learn over again that the fascination of the subject is the window it provides into another species with another language and through them to the environment as a whole; but most of all, the opportunity to meet interesting people along the way.

The more you learn the more there is to learn."

Events : Annie McGeoch



"I am Annie and been looking after bees for 10 years and studying them for 30! After years at work on screens indoors in the TV industry I decided bees and children fit the need to be away from screens and TV production. A friend from Devon gave me an old WBC and I acquired some bees and that was it. I was hooked. When I joined LBKA almost immediately Richard asked me to be on committee. I have helped with the School Food Matters programme for 4 years. I manage the two hives at Battersea Park children's zoo and engage the public most Saturday afternoons in the magic of bees and pollination at the zoo. Growing flowers trees and vegetables has also become an obsession so am now learning which bees need which flowers. Last year spent 5 days at festivals talking to the public about Yellow Legged hornet threat to pollinators . It's not all about honeybees. I have done many bee courses in disease, keeping bees, biology and behaviour."

Resources and Newsletter Editor: Elaine Ellis



Hi, I am Elaine, and I have been bee keeping for the past couple of years, having been mentored at Brockwell Park apiary I took my Basic Assessment last year. I now look after bee hives in The Foundry in Oval.

Recently I joined the LBKA committee and will be helping with the Newsletter and Resources. I am really looking forward to getting more involved with the work of LBKA and expanding my knowledge on bee keeping.

Member Workshops

Member Workshops, or meetings, happen on the second Sunday each month. These are a great opportunity to not only discuss the ‘topic of the workshop’ but also meet other members or ask questions about any aspect of LBKA or beekeeping. All are encouraged to attend these where possible, whether you’re a new member or been with us for years, and whether you’re an expert beekeeper or a complete novice. Hopefully see you soon at one of our workshops! Look out for details on our website at lbka.org.uk/events which is regularly updated.

Wax and Candle Workshop

Hosted by Sharon, Luke & Elliot on 8th December 2024. Members met at Battersea Park Zoo to learn how to render and clean wax, how to deal with wax in a sustainable way, how to make your own moulds, what the best size of wick to use, and common mistakes and solutions. Everyone went home with a small candle at the end of the workshop.



We received some feedback from our Bee Banter WhatsApp group:

From Vane :

“What a blissful experience at the workshop today! Well done to everyone for such a well-structured introduction to working with wax—I can’t wait for Part II The demonstrators were so

friendly, and we even got a goody bag to take home! I'm so grateful for the experience and eagerly looking forward to the next session. Thank You All"

From Liz :

"A lot of organising went into doing this excellent workshop including pre-filtering a huge amount of wax. I hadn't realised how much a candle would take!. Many thanks to Luke and Sharon. Very informative and fun!"

From Holly:

"Thank you for a Wonderful candle making workshop ! Sharon and Luke you are stars 🌟🌟 & lovely to meet you all ! I got blown off my bike only once on the way back and my candle survived 😊 as I took it out of the mold I was reflecting on.... a honey bee needs to eat 6-10 pounds of honey to make one pound of beeswax 🙏🐝"

Microscopy Workshop

Hosted by our very own Master Beekeeper Howard in Brockwell on 13th January. Here we have a write-up from Will with photographs provided by @abbygarden_apiry :

"January can often be a quiet month in the beekeeping year, which is why meeting up and chatting with members old and new for last Sunday's microscopy course at the Brockwell Community Garden in South London was the perfect antidote.

Before things began, I was sent on what I thought to be a fool's errand to 'find some flowers with pollen' for us to look at through the microscopes; I was pleasantly surprised to find a whole range of options in the nearby walled garden, including cyclamen, mahonia, hellebores, viburnum and some sort of vetch. It's amazing what can be found if you open your eyes, and that was certainly the theme of the morning.

Howard Nicols, in charge of the education side of the LBKA, kicked things off with a review of the different types of pollen and what to look out for when examining them under magnification.

He demonstrated how to prepare slides, use dyes to set up and mount them under the microscopes to look at what we had prepared. The range we saw was phenomenal, with pits, grooves, reticulated surfaces, pores, and so on, which helped us analyse and identify the source plants from which each came. It was fascinating!





We also examined a few specimens of (dead) bees under a magnifying glass. With the accompanying diagrams in 'The Biology of the Honeybee', we could see the detail of features such as the pollen combs on the legs, the hairs on the thorax and abdomen, the complex structure of the various mouth-parts and so on.

In addition, looking at the shapes and forms of the wings was instructive in being able to separate the different features that distinguish the subspecies of

Apis mellifera, as well as coming face-to-face with concepts such as the 'discoidal shift' and where to find the 'Cubital III junction'!

The workshop was a great way to spend a cold and frosty morning. Reminding us of our unique insight into this fascinating world of plants and their pollinators through beekeeping.”



Swarm Workshop

Our next workshop will be on Sunday 9th March. It will be a Swarm Workshop, led by experienced LBKA members. Here, you will learn how to safely and effectively catch and rehome a swarm. Please note that only those attending this workshop will be eligible to participate in the LBKA Swarm WhatsApp group.

Details on the location and timings will be announced soon, keep an eye on our website at lbka.org.uk/events.

In the Apiary

If you're new to beekeeping, or need a refresher, here's some information about what should be happening in the apiary around this time of year, [February](#). Text by Howard Nichols.

February is a time of increasing activity for the bees. Although cold and rainy on the outside, and, to all appearances all appears to be very quiet, a lot is happening inside the cluster. Brood rearing is increasing and this requires use of additional stores as the temperature in the centre

of the cluster is increased from 20°C to 35°C. Bees also consume relatively few stores in Winter but when they start to fly more in late February / early March the consumption substantially increases. Therefore, the main job of the beekeeper is to keep an eye on stores. Bee colonies are more likely to die out in February / early spring due to starvation, not due to the cold. My own personal view is that, as a beekeeper, I make various mistakes but simply letting my bees die of starvation through my neglect should not be one of them. As the weather has been warmer I assessed my colonies on 3rd February. I did not even need to disturb them by opening. They were all flying and bringing in pollen. I took the roof off (but not the crownboard) each colony and lifted the hive. I could tell that 1 colony was light on sugar and so have fed fondant to that 1 colony only at this stage. I intend to take off the mouseguards in next 2 weeks with a view to doing the 1st proper inspection early March if there is a warm day. I went into the winter with 5 colonies and still have 5 colonies which, although good news, is still too early to be confident. February and March are more demanding months than October through to the end of February.

The queen will now be laying at an increasing rate. The empty cells inside the cluster will have been prepared and more eggs are being laid. The temperature of a broodless cluster is maintained at 20°C but a cluster with brood requires a 35°C temperature. This, again, also consumes more stores.

If feeding is necessary then fondant is still the best bet. If, on a warm day, the bees are flying and emergency stores are required then feeding liquid stores is now a possibility. Bees carry and metabolise nectar at 50% concentration. 1kg of sugar dissolved in 1 litre of water will give this concentration and so involve the bees in the minimum amount of work. If stores are not required then it is better not to feed at all so not to cause any disturbance.

On a warm February day the bees will fly for forage. Main sources in February include snowdrop, crocus and early flowering hazel. The latter provides an abundance of pollen. If your bees have been foraging hazel then they will be coming back to the hive drenched in surplus bright yellow pollen. All these sources provide pollen only. Not nectar.

Late February and early March is a challenging time for bees. The winter bees are now old but need to work at an increasing rate to feed larvae and young bees. Many of these older bees will be dying off and a disproportionate number will die in the hive. It is not unusual to find a large quantity of dead bees in front of the hive or behind the mouseguard. Just lift the mouseguard and brush out. This should not normally be cause for concern and does not mean that the colony is dying out. If you keep your hive on a concrete or stone floor then the quantity of dead bees may appear to be alarming. If kept on grass then there may well be just as many dead bees but they will appear substantially less. You may not even notice them at all.

Other jobs to do :

Plan. Formulate an outline plan for the forthcoming season. Have a strategy to develop or improve a particular beekeeping skill during the forthcoming year.

Equipment. Assemble frames and ensure you have sufficient equipment for the season.

Site. New beekeepers who have not yet found a suitable site should try to do so by the end of the month. Once the beekeeping season starts then life can move at an alarming pace.

Meetings. Do not forget the LBKA monthly meetings on the 2nd Sunday of the month.

Out the Apiary

Beekeeping is no longer just about inside the apiary. What goes on outside the apiary is just as important. Here we look at what's in flower for this month, [February](#). Text by Mark Patterson.

There are valuable pollen sources that are making an appearance in February. **Winter Aconites** (*Eranthis hyemalis*) are beginning to appear. Their bright lemon yellow flowers are attractive to bees which will collect their pollen. They are members of the Buttercup family. In gardens hellebores are also flowering, offering much needed pollen.

Hellebores (pictured right) come in a wide variety of colours. The hybrid hellebores are particularly hardy and easy to grow as are the native stinking hellebores (*Helleborus foetidus*) which can be found in gardens and in wild areas too. **Winter heliotrope** (*Petasites fragrans*) is a relative of our native Butterbur but flowers much earlier. It's not a UK native and can be quite invasive when established in the wild but is a great garden plant for bees in late winter. The flowers are shaped like a toilet brush and pink in colour.



The first **daffodils** (*Narcissus* sp.) are beginning to bloom. Despite their attractive flowers, daffodils and other narcissii are poor forage for bees. I have never seen a Honey Bee visit them and only occasionally have I seen desperate Bumblebees alight on them.

Wallflowers (*Erysimum*) are flowering now and will continue to do so right through till late spring. Bees will visit both the popular bedding type wallflowers as well as the longer-lived everlasting perennial types. Their purple and orange 'bowls' are particularly good for bees as they have a very long flowering period and will bloom almost continuously all year round. Off the ground there are several shrubs and small trees which are now flowering and these may offer rewards of nectar on warm days alongside the pollen they produce. These include Mahonia or Oregon Grape which grows in our towns and cities in abundance and flowers throughout the winter providing nectar and pollen for bees.



In southern towns and cities Buff Tailed bumblebees (*Bombus terrestris*) continue to be increasingly active throughout the winter, surviving largely on this plant. Around 75% of winter flowers visited by bees are **Mahonia** (pictured left). The variety 'winters sun' is particularly attractive. Bees taking advantage of Mahonia blooms in winter have few other insects to compete with and can fare better than some colonies active in summer. **Viburnum** shrubs include a number of deciduous and evergreen species which flower during the winter months. They are relatives of our native Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*). Some of bees' most popular Viburnums include the evergreen *Viburnum tinus* whose sweetly scented cream blooms flower from November through to March, and *Viburnum bodnaense* whose pink flowers bloom from around Christmas to March.

Several Clematis species are useful forage sources to bees in winter. Clematis amandii and Clematis cirrhosa both have creamy white flowers and bloom in winter. Honey and winter active bumble bees will visit them for pollen.

Winter Flowering Cherry (Prunus subhirtella) flowers from late November to February producing pale pink flowers. I've very rarely seen any bees on the blooms but have often seen flies on them. In the absence of better forage like Mahonia bees will visit the flowers. **Sweet Box** (Sarcococca confusa) is a short growing evergreen shrub which produces extremely fragrant blooms (reminiscent of hyacinths) from late winter into early spring. It's one of those plants that you almost always smell long before you see it. **Winter Heather** (Heaths Erica sp.) produce tubular blooms in shades of white to pink throughout the winter. They are coming to the end of their flowering period now but still providing forage for bees brave enough to venture out.

Winter flowering Honeysuckle flower during winter, some of which are climbers and some are shrubs. One of the best is Lonicera fragrantissima. Daphne shrubs are beginning to flower now and their intense perfume-like scent will attract bees to collect their pollen. Hazel (Corylus avellana) is flowering now and the long male catkins drip with pollen. On warm days Honeybees may visit the catkins to collect pollen, though the plants are wind pollinated and do not need the bees to reproduce. Other trees that produce catkins may start to make an appearance in February include willows (Salix sp.) and poplars (Populus sp.) though they are usually a little later flowering.

Announcements

Follow us on Instagram!

With thanks to new committee member Dan, LBKA now has an active Instagram account.

Stay connected with us and show your support by following our [Instagram](#) page! By following our account, you'll get the information on Better Beekeeping practices, highlights from our events, and behind-the-scenes glimpses into the apiaries of London.

Engage with us through likes, shares, and comments, and feel free to tag us in your own posts, we love seeing what our members are up to! Your support helps us grow and reach more people who share our passion for beekeeping.

BBKA Assessment

Classes for this year BBKA Basic Assessment will begin shortly. Everyone who has completed mentoring with the LBKA is encouraged to apply for the Basic Assessment. For more information and to register your interest, please contact education@lbka.org.uk

Sherriff Sale

BJ Sherriff, manufacturers of UK made bee suits are offering a 10% discount on all suits ordered before the 28th February. Please contact LBKA Chair, Sharon Bassey at chair@lbka.org.uk for a discount code.

Request from Imperial College

We would like to work with beekeepers to help them with engineering solutions to promote the welfare of bees in London. Our project aim is to find problems and solve them through our designs.

We're really aiming to understand more about the process and are looking to find any difficulties you may have with beekeeping as well as problems surrounding bee survival.

If you are interested, please contact services@lbka.org.uk

Help with planting

We are looking for any members out there that are available this year to help plant the grounds of a community centre with wild life / pollinator friendly planting. It's near Lee SE12. If you are interested or for more information, please contact Paul planting@lbka.org.uk

The Hidden Hive

A Photographic Exploration of Urban Beekeeping

This project aims to document the vibrant world of urban beekeeping in London through compelling photography. By capturing the challenges, rewards, and human stories behind these vital initiatives, the project will raise awareness of the importance of urban beekeeping for biodiversity, food production, and community engagement.

Project Goals:

- To document the diverse practices and challenges of urban beekeeping in London.
- To showcase the positive impact of urban beekeeping on pollinators and the environment.
- To portray the human element of urban beekeeping, highlighting the passion and dedication of London beekeepers.
- To create a visually engaging and informative body of work that will resonate with audiences.
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Photography Approach:

The project will focus on a variety of aspects, including:

- Photographing beekeepers inspecting hives, harvesting honey, and tending to their bees.
- Documenting the diverse locations of urban beehives, from rooftops and balconies to community gardens.
- Capturing portraits of beekeepers and documenting their personal stories and motivations.
- Photographing the positive effects of beekeeping on local flora and fauna.

Value to Beekeepers:

- **Visibility:** The project will provide valuable visibility for the work of London beekeepers and raise awareness of the importance of urban beekeeping.

- **High-Quality Images:** Beekeepers will receive high-resolution digital copies of photographs featuring their hives, bees, and their work. These images can be used for their own promotional materials, educational purposes, or personal use.
- **Collaboration:** Beekeepers will have the opportunity to collaborate with the photographer, sharing their insights and perspectives on urban beekeeping.

Dissemination:

- The project will be showcased through exhibitions, online galleries, publications, or social media campaigns.

Contact Information:

Monika Szolle

Email: monikaszollephotography@gmail.com

Website: monikaszollephotography.com

A Night At The Natural History Museum

Big Circus Media are casting real people and groups from a cross-section of society for a night at The Natural History Museum on 26th February. You'll take on tasks, challenges and be part of fascinating discussions about the future of our planet. It's going to be a really fun evening and a unique chance to experience the museum during an exclusive event, great to come with a group of friends or as a place to meet people. And it's completely free!

If this sounds like something you'd be interested in please RSVP to me ASAP to holly.ascherl@bigcircus.co.uk and book your place and ask any initial questions.

(over 18's only, no age limit)

The Beehive Vauxhall Pub Social

The pub socials are returning! These very informal monthly meet ups are a great opportunity to meet other beekeepers over a drink or two. You'll inevitably talk about all aspects of beekeeping, and a lot more. They tend to be the last Tuesdays of the month but this may change in future months. You can keep up to date with all our events on our website www.lbka.org.uk/events which is regularly updated. The next pub social is planned for Tuesday 25th February at the aptly named **The Beehive pub** in **Vauxhall** 51 Durham St, London SE11 5JA from 6pm. Do join us if you can, even if briefly.

<p>That's it for this newsletter. If you wish to contribute to a future edition by writing articles, have anything to announce, or just have something to share with other members, please feel free to contact us by e-mail to services@lbka.org.uk or speaking with any committee member.</p>
