



# The London Beekeepers' Association

# LBKA News

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## Announcements



### Spring lecture

We've just announced a Spring lecture at **18:30** for 19:00 at **Roots and Shoots** (Walnut Tree Walk, SE11 6DN) on **Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> March**.

David Rudland – FERA Bee Inspector and instructor – will give us a talk and practical demonstration of the importance of **bringing colonies out of winter and into the Spring**. This will include tips on how to recognise and encourage the productive build up of your colonies. David is a particularly engaging speaker and we are very pleased to be hosting him.

**Places are limited** so please send a note by email to [admin@lbka.org.uk](mailto:admin@lbka.org.uk) if you'd like to attend. This is an **LBKA-only** event, but we will also invite others from neighbouring beekeeping associations.

### March monthly meeting: Nosema

Richard Glassborow will lead next monthly meeting on Sunday 9<sup>th</sup> March, at which we will be testing members' bees for nosema, a fungal parasite that resides in bees' guts. Nosema is a particular problem for bees coming out of winter because it can prevent colonies from building up quickly enough.

You provide your bees, we provide microscopes and will take you through the procedure. Although this is primarily intended for intermediary level beekeepers with bees it is by no means exclusive. All are welcome, with or without bees. New or experienced there is always something to learn.

It makes most sense to test bees you have concerns about. At this time of year it may be a little early to tell, but failure to build up the colony, or worse, dwindling, may be caused by nosema for instance. Any signs of spotting on the landing board of hive, though not directly attributable to nosema may be an indicator. The following link is worth consulting: <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=191>

Suggested ways to collect a sample of bees were circulated by email to members recently. Please do not bring live bees to the meeting! To kill your sample (yes I know it goes against the grain, but it's for the greater good etc.), place in deep-freeze overnight – this can be done a few days in advance.

### Native wildflower meadow creation

Straight after the monthly meeting, Mark Paterson has organising wildflower meadow planting. We have teamed up with Groundwork London and Hyde Housing association to create 400m<sup>2</sup> of native wildflower meadow on the Kennington Park Housing estate, Oval. We will meet at **13:15 outside Oval Tube station**. If you miss us, just walk West along Kennington Park Road and you'll see us on the green space to the left of the road.

We are also providing **LBKA pollinator mix** annuals to plant along the estate frontage on Kennington Park Road and herbaceous pollinator friendly planting for raised garden areas on the estate.

Please come and join us in what should be an enjoyable afternoon of light work and learn how to create a fantastic pollinator friendly native meadow in the process.



**There's a job here for everyone of every ability.**

All tools/gloves will be provided and refreshments (including honey beer, kindly donated by member Hannah Rhodes).

### Archbishop's Park bulb planting update

Our November bulb-planting event in Archbishop's Park was not in vain, the snowdrops and crocuses are in bloom!





### National pollinator strategy consultation

DEFRA is holding a public consultation on draft strategy to protect pollinating insects such as different species of bees and other insects such as hoverflies, beetles and flies. **Each of us can make our views known.** It will also consider further evidence gathering to provide a sound basis for future policy actions. They will host some workshops to provide updates on the strategy and supporting science, some of which will be in London. See <http://goo.gl/vTsjM9> for more details.

### Member discounts

Angela and Mark have arranged that members can get discounts from number of suppliers including **Fragile Planet** (equipment), **Thorne** (equipment; 5%), **BBWear** (equipment and clothing; 20%) **Rosybee** (pollinator-friendly plants; 15%), Meadow in my Garden (pollinator-friendly seeds; 10-15%), **Sarah Raven Seeds** (pollinator-friendly seeds; 10%) and **French Flint** (up to 50%).

Please email [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) for more details and the required discount codes.



### Bee Basic certificate

There's still time to for the **Bee Basic Certificate** from BBKA. We recommend all beekeepers who have kept bees for at least a year to take this, and we will even refund the exam registration cost if you pass! Email Howard on [education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk) if you want to know more.

### Free seeds!

"Grow wild" a national campaign to encourage communities across the UK to plant UK native wildflowers now has community growing kids and free packs of seeds to give away. Register for yours here: <https://www.growwilduk.com/community-kit>

### A chance to do a hive inspection

Jon Harris is offering the chance for a few members to accompany him to inspect

some of the MET Police's hive in Kennington. These will be on Saturday 5<sup>th</sup> April 16:00), Wednesday 16<sup>th</sup> April (12:00), Saturday 26<sup>th</sup> April (15:00), Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May (16:00), Friday 23<sup>rd</sup> May (12:00hrs) and Saturday 7<sup>th</sup> June (18:00). If you're interested, please contact Jon at [treasurer@lbka.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@lbka.org.uk). **Places are limited - first come, first served!**



### Member services

We're trying to make our services to members easier to find. Go to the "Member services" section of the website (<http://lbka.org.uk/members.html>) where we are starting to compile a list.

### LBKA Forum

The LBKA Forum is pretty quiet at the moment. This is probably because the audience is much larger and public for our Facebook page, making it a better place to discuss beekeeping issues. We will lodge copies of the newsletter and committee meeting minutes here, which people can comment on if they chose. It may also be a good place to discuss forthcoming proposed changes to the constitution. If you'd like to join LBKA Forum, email [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk).

### It's your newsletter!

We welcome contributions to the newsletter from members. This will make it more interesting. It could be an article or blog post that you've published elsewhere, your perspective on something, what's going on in your apiary or a write-up of an

event you've been to. Volunteering to be a contributor to write material when needed is also helpful; for example, for writing up LBKA events including monthly meetings. You could even use the newsletter to sell nucs to members or other similar beekeeping services. Enquires and contributions to [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk).

**Thanks to Angela Woods, Mark Paterson, Howard Nichols and Simon Wilks for their contributions this month.**

## Volunteers (still) needed!

Thank you for those who have offered their voluntary service. We're still looking more! Please consider volunteering - it's a good way to help out our association, to get involved in the beekeeping worlds and to meet people. Information about what we're looking for is available at <http://lbka.org.uk/members.html>.

### Mentors

If you're an experienced beekeeper who'd you'd like to pass his or her knowledge onto keen mentees, please contact [mentoring@lbka.org.uk](mailto:mentoring@lbka.org.uk). We're particularly short of mentors in North, West and Central London.

### Nucs list coordinator

To maintain the list of members looking to purchase nucleoli (nucs) of bees from us, prioritising members that meet our criteria and liaising with the LBKA apiaries to supply them.

### Librarian

To organise our library so that members can borrow books, maintain a list of what is available, keep track of who's borrowed what and may involve bringing books to monthly meetings.

## Standby volunteers

We also need to have a list of volunteers that we can call on to help with our events. Please consider joining our list if you're interested in getting involved in the organisation during the year, but don't have the time for a specific role. There's no obligation.

## Volunteer coordinator

With all these anticipated new offers of help, we need someone to coordinate the volunteer effort, finding and allocating volunteers to various roles for our event. This interesting role will put you in touch with most of the organisation.

## March in the apiary

*Howard Nichols*

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

March is a time of increasing activity within the hive but it all depends upon the weather. For the beekeeper it is also a month of increasing anticipation. The colony at the end of March should be substantially different from the one at the beginning. The intervening days can include warm, sunny days, which encourage some plants to flower early, and bees to forage. The weather can just as easily revert back to cold. The former causes the bees to produce more brood and the latter to retreat back to a cluster.

- The main job for the beekeeper is still to keep an eye on stores. Old "winter" bees are starting to die off and new bees are being born. Food reserves are decreasing but demand for food is substantially increasing. The bees will be using energy flying on warmer days but only bringing in pollen, not nectar. They also need to keep the brood at a higher temperature (about 35C) which also uses more energy.

Stores can quickly be depleted in March and early April.

- The first warm day from the start of March is an opportunity to have a quick look inside the hive. If so, then this will constitute the 1st inspection of the new season. The new colony card should be made up and inspection details recorded. Minimum temperature should be 10C for a quick look but without taking out brood frames.. If there is an exceptionally warm day with the temperature 18C or more then a more detailed colony inspection, including taking out and assessing the frames, may be made. Otherwise, leave this until April.
- If an inspection is not possible, then observing the colony entrance will provide valuable information. If the bees are bringing in pollen, purposefully entering and leaving (flying a beeline) then these are always good signs. If the bees are aimless, listless or without purpose on a warm day then all may not be well.
- Monitoring varroa mites. This is a good time to monitor the mite drop. Leave the inserts in for a week and count the mite drop. If > 2 mites per day then some action will be needed in Spring. If > 7 mites per day then action is immediately required. Fera produces an excellent booklet "Managing Varroa" which is available for free download. There is also comprehensive information about varroa on the Fera website, including an on line varroa count calculator. <http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/>
- Siting your bees. Those who were on the LBKA mentoring schemes last year and have not yet acquired bees (but will now do so) should prepare the hive and site. If acquiring bees by means of the purchase of a nucleus from a supplier then the order should have been placed by now. Demand often exceeds supply.
- Mentoring. Those who will not keep bees this year but want to have mentoring with

a more experienced beekeeper should make suitable arrangements.

Finally, on a sad note, if you find your bees are dead then it is imperative to close the entrance to prevent robbing. Make a note of what you observe then remove and destroy dead bees and frames. Sterilise the hive parts. It is essential to try to find out why the bees have died. Colony losses frequently exceed 20% to 30% so you are not alone. It does not always mean that it is the beekeeper's fault but it is essential to analyse and learn. Examples of reasons include, but are not limited to, the varroa mite (the number 1 offender), lack of stores, damp / inadequate hive ventilation, site situated in a frost pocket, failing queen, poorly mated queen.

On a more optimistic note, the beekeeping season arrives in March. We have several eventful months ahead. The colony will be changing from week to week. I sincerely hope that all of us have a productive season and achieve whatever aims and goals we aspire to!

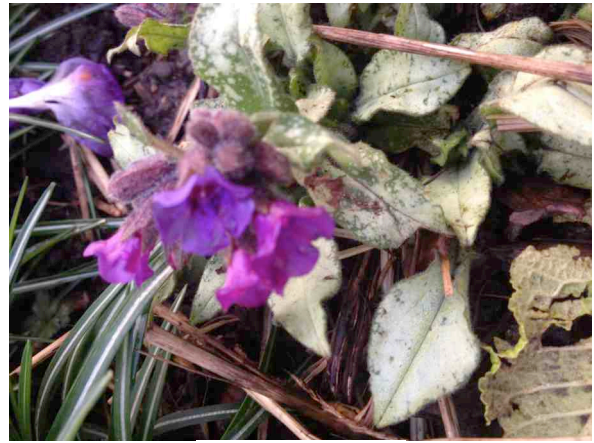
## March in the forage patch

*Mark Paterson*



March is usually a month when the onset of spring really starts to become visually obvious. Bulbous plants such as Crocus, Tulip, Daffodil, Squill, Hyacinth and Anemones really come into their own putting on vivid shows of colour and providing much needed pollen for our bees.

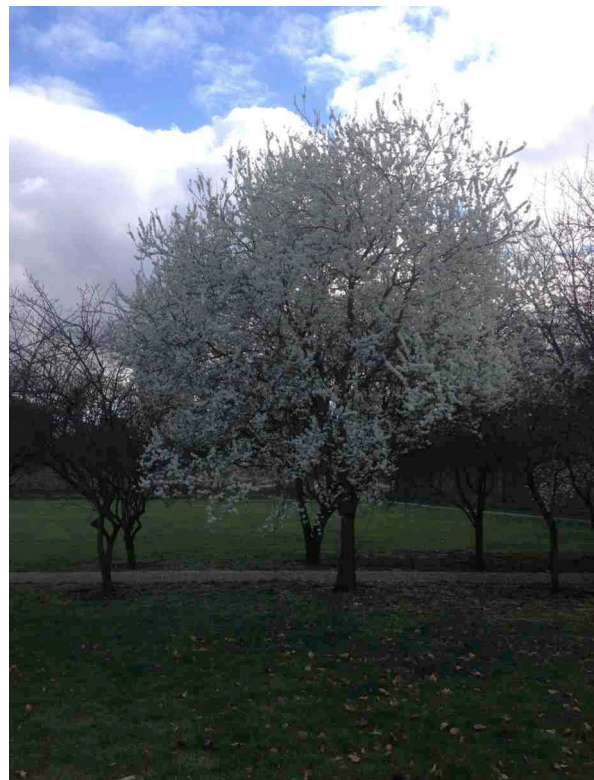
Other plants making an appearance this month will be Flowering currant - one of the earliest nectar sources, Black Thorn, Some of the early cherries, Plum's and Damson trees, Flowering Quince and Pulmonaria. The later being a favourite



Pulmonata purple



Pulmonaria white



Early apple blossom

with early bumble bees and the Hairy footed Flower bee which is active March to late May. Some varieties of Apple and Pear may also start flowering. Now is a good time to prune fruit trees before they flower. Cut back to strong growth with large healthy buds. This will focus the trees energies on the remaining blossoms and developing fruit and prevent trees becoming tall and leggy.

Due to the unseasonably mild February many March flowering species have already begun flowering in some parts of the city. During the last week of February I was able to find all of the above named plants flowering in small amounts in various places around the city. Unusually Rosmary, Ceonothus, Escalonia, Hebe and many other late spring/summer flowering species have already begun early flowering. The danger is that the mild weather may turn cold again knocking these plants back, but if it remains consistently mild we may see more early flowering in other species. A early spring could lead to earlier spring build up and earlier swarms.

Many herbaceous plants in the garden will be finally starting to emerge from their dormancy and begin putting on fresh growth. Cut back last years growth if you haven't already to allow them unrestricted room to grow.

Now is also the time to begin sowing summer fruit and vegetables indoors or in your green house to ensure you have plants ready to plant out late April and May which will be pollinated by your bees.

Mid March onward's is the time to sow your LBKA pollinator mix seeds to ensure you have flowers by the end of May.



## Mark Paterson: out and about

*Mark Paterson*

*As committee member and forage officer, Mark is always busy with LBKA-related work. Here's a glimpse into his LBKA life.*

I had enquiries from 2 corporates about forage creation in their business grounds, 5 enquiries from students/academics starting research on honey bee foraging in the urban landscape and 2 requests to give presentations or attend corporate events as part of climate change week

I have been planning for the planting task on the 9th March, buying seeds and plants and arranging tools.

On the 22nd February I attended the BBKA special interest day on landscape and forage in Coventry. This was a gathering of associations to look at how we can each individually contribute towards the BBKA's efforts to increase forage for bees on a national level. This may lead to the creation of forage officers at many other associations and form a forage steering group for the BBKA. I took along examples of the leaflets and banners which LBKA have for our events - most other associations having nothing like these resources and some were quite envious of us for having them. We are one of only 2 associations known to have a forage officer. During the day we identified opportunities for forage creation and discussed funding.

## Buying bees

Buying bees as nuclei (nucs) is the most common way in which people buy bees.

Both BBKA and FERA have best-practice guidelines that advise what you should expect when buying bees and what you should do if you're selling them. Both are worth a read.

BBKA's leaflet (<http://bit.ly/1lCQjUw>) gives detailed advice about the condition

and structure of the nuc colony that should be expected, along with some advice.

FERA's leaflet (<http://bit.ly/1gdgYjw>) outlines what a buyer should expect and look for:

- Have a good quality, young laying queen. She may be marked and/or clipped.
- Have all stages of bee brood present.
- Be free of signs of disease.
- Have at least three frames with brood.
- Have four frames or more fully covered with honey bees.
- Have the equivalent of at least one full comb of honey and half a frame of pollen as stores.
- All combs should be in a good and clean condition, preferably being less than oneseason old.

It also highlights the need to document any movement of bees and suggests a form for this purpose.

One of the services we offer to members is to sell that we have nurtured to these standards. Most of these come from

swarms we have collected the previous year.

There weren't many swarms last years and the nucs we had have not survived the winter unfortunately. **So we don't have any nucs for member at the moment.**

You can still email [nucs@lbka.org.uk](mailto:nucs@lbka.org.uk) to get your name on a **waiting list** for nucs available later this year. Priority is given to new beekeepers that have completed a basic beekeeping course, have been mentored for a year and have been passed as ready to keep bees by their mentor.

There are plenty of other places you can buy bees. We recommend that you get them **locally if possible** from a **reputable supplier**. Peter Little is a very reputable supplier of bees (though not especially local). We have obtained a number of queens from him in the past: <http://www.exmoorbeesandbeehives.co.uk>.

## Last month's meeting

*Howard Nichols*

Attendance at the meeting was about 40 in number and these ranged from new beekeepers to older, more established beekeepers. The February morning was cold but we have the benefit of a spacious, well-heated room at Fairley School.

The theme of the meeting was early Spring management of bees and then a practical demonstration and discussion of the Bailey frame change. Later spring management topics were not covered so as to keep the discussion more focussed. A variety of topics were addressed including:

- Objectives of keeping the bees as this influences certain aspects of early Spring work.
- Servicing of equipment and benefit of making up frames in advance rather than during the season.

**Advice Note - Advice for Obtaining Honey Bees**

**Background**

As with any livestock there are good, average and bad strains of all races of honey bee and it is important for beekeepers, especially those new to the craft, to source bees that are suitable, being docile, productive, disease free and not inclined to swarm. You can obtain bees as a full colony, nucleus, package or swarm.

Full colonies are usually only available when a beekeeper is setting up or downsizing and are the most expensive way of buying bees, though you may save money on any bees/queen bought.

Bees suppliers usually offer nuclei which comprise of five combs, bees, brood, laying queen and stores. These generally come in a returnable or supplied travelling box and will need to be transferred to a clean, ventilated hive. When obtained early in the season these can quickly be built up into a full colony and may give a small honey crop.

Package bees, though unusual in the UK, provide an alternative to purchasing colonies or nuclei of bees. A package of bees is about 1.5-2 kg of winter bees, a queen and sugar or candy on food in a shipping container. All these are no-frills or combs supplied they will need immediate housing in the same way as a swarm. UK law states that containing new hives/colonies or swarms, that have been swarmed.

Swarms are available to collect but unless you have some beekeeping experience and the ability to collect them they should be avoided.

**When buying bees:**

- Ascertain that the stock offered are suitable for your needs. Try to avoid sourcing bees from outside your area as it could accelerate the spread of pests and diseases. Many beekeepers consider that local strains generally suit the natural flora of that locality.
- Use a reputable supplier. References may help you choose.
- Check with the supplier where the queen has come from. It is not always clear what strain of honey bee you are obtaining and whether the queen has been bred by the supplier, bought in or imported.
- If you import bees then make sure that you do this carefully. Follow the import rules if they come from outside the country through the proper channels of health certification. Guidance is available on Fera's National Bee Unit (NBU) website [www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com)
- If possible examine the bees before purchase to ensure they meet the required standard and are disease free. If you are not competent to do this then ask a beekeeper who is to check for you if the vendor is not prepared to show you or allow examination, consider why.
- If frames are marked with the point of origin it will help traceability.
- Maintain a record of your purchase. A suggested form for this purpose is on the reverse of this factsheet.
- By Summer 2011 beekeepers registered on BeeBase will be able to record a purchase, sale, gift or movement of bees within their BeeBase records.
- If you would like to register on BeeBase go to [www.nationalbeeunit.com](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com) or call 01504 482510.

**As a guide a good nucleus will:**

- Have a good quality, young laying queen. She may be marked and/or clipped.
- Have all stages of bee brood present.
- Be free of signs of disease.
- Have at least three frames with brood.
- Have four frames or more fully covered with honey bees.
- Have the equivalent of at least one full comb of honey and half a frame of pollen as stores.
- All combs should be in a good and clean condition, preferably being less than one season old.

**a healthy bees plan leaflet**



- Minimal hive inspection late February and full inspection in March, depending upon the outside temperatures.
- Spring cleaning of the hive
- Feeding, including types of feed and underlying reasons for stronger or weaker syrup feeds and contrasting these with use of fondant.
- A variety of other early Spring tasks.

The second part of the meeting was given over to the Bailey frame change, including a practical demonstration of the most basic method for frame change of old and pollen clogged frames only. Other variations such as a fast Bailey change were not dealt with so as to maintain a focus on the most basic method. A summary of the Bailey frame change is included with this newsletter. This method is slightly more advanced and modern than the basic method dealt with at our monthly meeting and there are several slight variations on the central theme. At the March monthly meeting we will be addressing the subject of Nosema, including microscopic testing. The use of Fumidil B to treat for Nosema is now at an end and alternative strategies need to be sought. One such method is variation of the Bailey frame change and this is also included with this newsletter.

After the main part of the meeting had finished we continued with our usual informal and friendly chat over a cup of tea and cake. To any new members who have not been to our Sunday monthly meetings please do come along and give it a try. You will find a friendly atmosphere and informative and passionate discussion about many beekeeping aspects. The monthly meetings are all included within your membership and are free to all. Even the tea, coffee and cake are free!

## Bailey comb change

Howard Nichols

*Bailey comb change is a less drastic way of replacing old frames in the broodbox than the Shook swarm, as the brood is allowed to hatch out. Howard demonstrated this (on empty hives) at last month's monthly meeting.*

**Variant 1: Bailey comb change to replace all the combs (for hygienic reasons, old distorted combs but no signs of disease)**

### Equipment needed

Clean brood chamber with clean frames of foundation, eke with entrance, clean floor, contact feeder + surround

### Step 1

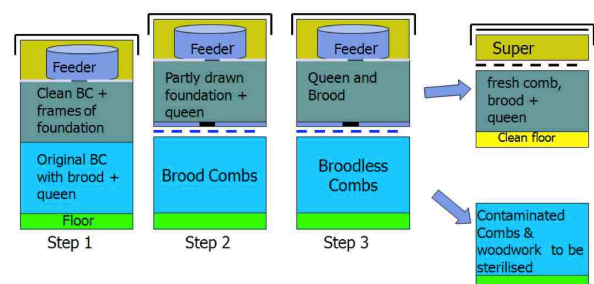
Prepare a clean brood chamber filled with frames of foundation and place it over the existing brood chamber.

Feed with strong sugar syrup (unless honey flow is on) to enable the bees to drawn out at least one frame of foundation.

### Step 2

Once there are freshly drawn combs in the upper brood chamber restrict the queen to the upper chamber by placing her on one of these combs with excluder between the two BCs.

Close off the old entrance and provide a new hive entrance between the two brood boxes (an eke with an entrance will do).



### Step 3

After 24 days the brood in the lower BC will have emerged allowing you to remove the BC of old combs (combs can be sterilised if worth retaining or rendered down for the wax), the eke and replace original floor with clean floor.

You may need to continue feeding until most of combs in the clean brood chamber are drawn.

### Variant 2: Bailey comb change to transfer bees from combs contaminated with Nosema spores onto clean comb

#### Equipment needed

Clean brood chamber (BC) with some clean frames (preferably of clean drawn comb) , eke with entrance, clean floor, contact feeder + surround (or frame feeder)

#### Step 1

Find the queen and place the frame (with her on) into clean brood chamber (identify this frame with a spot of marking paint or drawing pin). Add a frame or two of clean drawn comb on either side of this and use a dummy board to restrict her to those combs (as colony probably weak) Use sterile drawn comb, if available, as infected colonies not good at drawing comb

Gentle manipulation required at all times as you don't want to stress the bees as they may defaecate and leave Nosema spores on the clean combs you have just given them.

#### Step 2

In original BC remove all unoccupied outer combs and use dummy board to tighten frames in the BC.

Reassemble colony with original BC on floor, queen excluder, an eke with entrance facing forwards, clean brood chamber with queen, clean crown board and roof

Combs in upper clean BC should be directly above those in lower BC

The colony will need feeding with heavy syrup. They are too weak to come away

from the cluster to use a rapid feeder so use either a contact feeder (which will need a empty super or eke to surround it) or a frame feeder

Close original front entrance so all fliers enter and leave via new upper entrance

#### Step 3

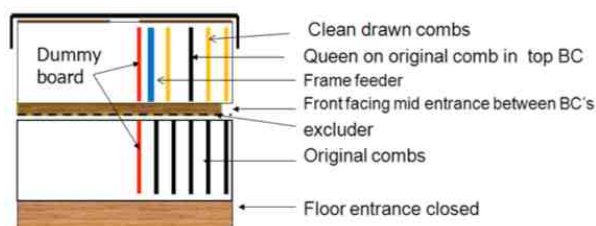
Once queen is laying on adjacent new combs transfer the marked frame in top BC to bottom BC

#### Step 4

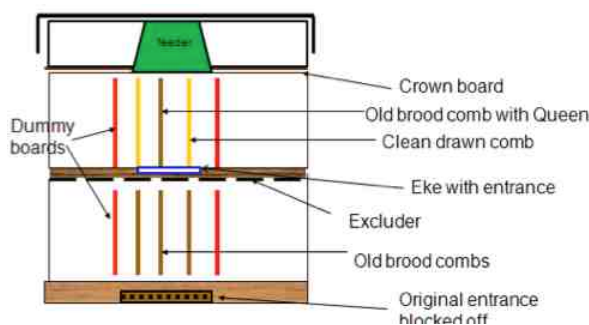
Once all the brood in bottom box emerged, remove it. Gently shake off the bees from it and its frames so that they join the rest of the colony and rearrange colony onto a clean floor

#### Step 5

As the colony expands then give them more combs (foundation should be OK now) as and when required moving the dummy board along to accommodate them (similar to building a nucleus up).



With frame feeder



With contact feeder

### Finally

Old comb can be fumigated with 80% acetic acid or destroyed depending what state they are in.

As the queen may be infected with Nosema, she can be replaced when mated queens are available later in the year.

## Gardening on balconies

Mark Paterson

I'm often asked what can be planted at height to help bees. Here in the city many of us live in high rise apartments or flats with little personal outdoor space. If we were lucky we may have a small balcony or roof terrace and if very fortunate a garden.

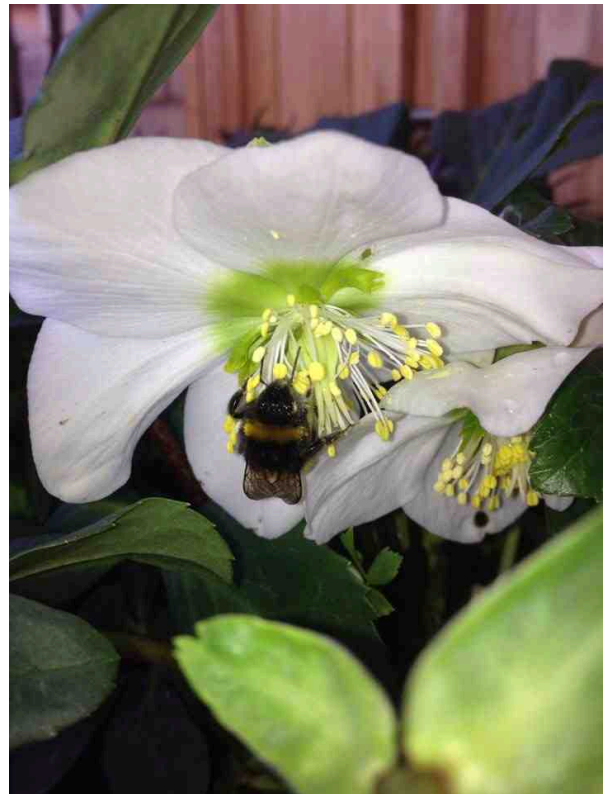
Even in a small confined space such as a balcony or small roof terrace it is possible to attract a large number of bees and other pollinating insects.

Choose plants that do well in containers and can tolerate shallow growing conditions.

Maritime and alpine plants will do well on high-rise buildings as they have adaptations to cope with growing at altitude such as waxy, leathery or narrow leaves to avoid moisture loss through caused by winds blowing through them.

Plants that are low growing and don't have long slender flower stalks will grow better at height than tall ones which may be blown over or snapped.

Some examples of plants I grow on my Balcony and window boxes on my 4th floor apartment include: **Saxifrage "Peter Pan"** (popular with sweat bees), **thrift** (popular with honey bees and short tongued bumble bees), **chives** (favourite of bumble bees), **crocus** (popular with most bees), **squill** (visited by honey bees), **Christmas Rose** (honey and bumble bees will collect pollen from it), **hebe** (copes well with windy conditions, especially the dwarf varieties. the flowers are visited by a wide range of bees), **wall flower "Bowles Mauve"** (often grow in window positions in the wild, popular with bumble bees, hairyfooted flower bees and butterflies), **aubretia** (popular with bees and butterflies),



**sedums** (grow wild in mountain and coastal habitats. flowers are attractive to bees), **lavender** (grows wild in coastal and mountain habitats in its native Mediterranean; copes well in exposed but sunny positions and grows well in poor shallow soil; favourite with bumble bees; choose hybrid varieties like 'Edelweiss' and 'Gros Bleu' which are more attractive to bees than the traditional English lavenders such as Hidcote), **oregano** (one of the most popular plants with honey bees; will grow well in window boxes even at height), **thyme** (often grows in exposed habitats in the wild and will grow well in window boxes even at height; attractive to honey bees.), **Devils bit Scabious** (native flower attractive to bees), **Birds foot trefoil** (native flower popular with bees), **Bearded hawkbit** (dandelion like flower attractive to bees), **sea and bladder champions** (native plants of coastal areas), **eryngium** (sea holly; there are many dwarf garden cultivars of this UK native plant attractive to pollinators that like its wild ancestor will grow well in exposed but sunny positions and **Spanish Gorse** (a very prickly and diminutive relative of Gorse this plant produces yellow flowers attractive to bees.)

These represent but a few of the plants which will attract bees to a moderately high balcony or roof terrace providing it receives some sun for at least part of the day.

If you live very high up then you will be less likely to be visited by bees which naturally forage not much higher than tree-canopy height (you will however have a lovely display of flowers). Honey bees in particular, which use complex communications to inform their hive members where to locate the best forage have no way of communicating height in their waggle dances so are unlikely to visit very tall buildings to forage.

When planting up your balcony or roof terrace choose the biggest containers you can comfortably fit in your space, safely move and transport. Rather than using pure soil or compost try mixing in Perlite with the compost or hydroponic expanded clay pebbles which will reduce the weight of the containers when full. You can also add moisture retaining gel crystals to reduce the frequency of watering and prevent plants from drying out.

## Musing of a Beekeeper

*Simon Wilks*

Many years ago, I trained for what turned out to be a brief and fruitless career in teaching. One of the few things from that training that stuck to my reluctant mind was the guidance given on dealing with unruly classes. In broad terms, the advice was that a class should never be permitted to become unruly because, once it had, there was nothing to be done about it.

Beekeepers seeking advice on dealing with nosema will find themselves similarly instructed. The NBU, for example, says roughly:

*"Instead of using medicines for treatment of Nosemosis, beekeepers should maintain ...strong, productive well-fed and*

*disease tolerant colonies headed by young prolific queens. Bee keepers should also consider re-queening susceptible colonies with queens from more tolerant stocks of bees better able to cope with Nosema infection."* [1].

This is good, sound advice. And, given there is no medicine any more (the friendly-sounding Fumidil B having vanished, and being less than useless against *Nosema ceranae* [2] anyhow), it's very nearly useful advice. But, for the beekeeper faced with a colony that's failing to build up, or even dwindling, it lacks a degree of helpfulness.

It's tempting to let the bees pursue their own destiny without interference in the hope that something, other than toes, will turn up. But this can create more problems than it solves. Failing colonies, even in cool weather, will attract other bees who might fancy a bit of robbing. And the bees of failing colonies might try to drift if better chances offer themselves elsewhere. We now also know that wild bees of other species are susceptible to, and can pick up, infections from honeybees [3], including *Nosema ceranae* and deformed wing virus (DWV), so it seems irresponsible to leave the bees to their own devices if we know there's something wrong.

The best approach may be to close up infected colonies and destroy them. That would certainly be hygienic. But hygiene isn't everything, and if we did that with every infection, there would be no opportunity for tolerance to evolve. Moreover, we know that *Nosema* doesn't have a consistent effect. Colonies with apparently high infestations can recover, and those with low infestations can suddenly collapse. Others can appear to recover, and then throw in the towel.

Nobody really knows why this is. One line of research has found that *Nosema ceranae* becomes more lethal in combination with one or more viruses [4] and, by implication, varroa. Though, happily, DWV and *Nosema ceranae* don't seem to have a combined effect, at least in honeybees [5]

What we do know is that the bees in infected colonies won't necessarily be infected to the same extent. To some that suggests our current method of assessing infection - which involves looking at a small sample of older bees - may give a misleading result one way or another. Although older bees may be more likely to be infected, those that can still fly might have avoided catching it badly. What seems to matter is the proportion of bees, young or old, that are infected, rather than the number of spores in a particular sample. But we can't assess that without taking a large, random sample from throughout the hive and inspecting them individually and, even if we did, there'd still be no treatment.

However, the little we know does give clues to practical action we might take. If we're trying to reduce the number of the spores circulating in the hive, reduce the opportunities for robbing/drifts and give the bees a fighting chance, then cleaning up seems a good idea. One thing, as I suggested last month, is to clear dead bees from floors regularly.

Hooper, in his *Guide to Bees and Honey* [6], suggests removing all the frames without brood on them, fumigating them with acetic acid, replacing them in the hive and then adding bees from a stronger colony. This seems a reasonable idea, but isn't going to appeal to the beekeeper with just one colony, and acetic acid's nasty stuff and hardly worth playing with just to save a few frames of possibly infected stores.

I'd suggest a more reasonable alternative would be to move a two or three brood frames to a nuc box with the queen and all the bees, fill the rest of the box with frames of foundation, feed heavily and keep the entrance small. Most of the stores and comb that may be harbouring spores can then be disposed of and the original hive scorched out and cleaned up properly. The bees may still perish but, in the meantime, at least you'll have reduced the chances of the disease spreading, and you'll have given them a fighting chance.

I've done this successfully only once, and maybe I was lucky. I fed syrup alone and it may be better with pollen-containing fondant, which would boost nutrition and reduce the need to forage. There are also some proprietary supplements and feeds that some beekeepers speak warmly of. But as so much depends on individual cases, and there are so many things that we don't know, it's impossible to be certain.

For the moment, it's up to us to use our common sense, and the little bits of knowledge we've got, to do our best. The recent research into the spread of *Nosema ceranae* into bumble bees [3] is likely to concentrate minds. But as the authors of that report wrote:

*"...it will be crucial to involve key stakeholders (for example, the beekeeping community, Bombus exporters) in any decision process, as any progress made will largely be driven by their actions."*

That means us. And it means that what we do now is as important as whatever's decided we should do in future.

[1] **NBU Beebase**, *Nosema* <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/Index.cfm?pageid=191> (degibberised)

[2] **Wei-Fone Huang et al.**, *Nosema ceranae* Escapes Fumagillin Control in Honey Bees *PLoS Pathogens* DOI: 10.1371/journal.ppat.1003185 (2013) <http://www.plospathogens.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.ppat.1003185>

[3] **M. A. Fürst et al.**, Disease associations between honeybees and bumblebees as a threat to wild pollinators. *Nature* 506, 364–366 (2014) <http://www.nature.com/nature/journal/v506/n7488/full/nature12977.html>

[4] **Bromenshenk JJ et al.**, **Iridovirus and Microsporidian** Linked to Honey Bee Colony Decline. *PLoS ONE* 5(10): e13181. (2010) <http://www.plosone.org/article/info%3Adoi%2F10.1371%2Fjournal.pone.0013181>

[5] **Stephen J Martin, et al.**, Do the honeybee pathogens *Nosema ceranae* and deformed wing virus act synergistically? *Environ Microbiol Rep.* 5(4), 506–510 (2013). <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3806273/>

[6] **Hooper**, *Guide to Bees and Honey*.

## Upcoming events

We list our events and some other organised by others that we think are of interest to members. **If you have any suggestions**, please email Aidan at [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk). See <http://www.lbka.org.uk/events/> for the most up-to-date events information.

### Saturday, 8th March: BBKA Varroa Special Interest Day

*10:30-16:30 at British Bee Keepers' Association National Agricultural Centre Stoneleigh Park Kenilworth CV8 2LG.*

The fight against varroa is ongoing. The BBKA is holding a Special Interest Day at which presentations will be made by Professor Ratneiks (LASI about the latest developments on varroa management), Wally Thrale (Bedford Beekeepers - the developments and outcomes of the East Anglian Research Varroa project), NBU (current strategies) and a Bee Gym Presentation. Followed by discussion for further research, beekeeper needs and discerning the route forward. Full agenda [here](#).

If you're an LBKA or BBKA member and would like to take part in this Special Interest Day, please register your interest with Jan Alcock at [jan.alcock@bbka.org.uk](mailto:jan.alcock@bbka.org.uk).

### Sunday 9th March: Monthly meeting: Nosema

*11:00-12:00 at Fairley House Junior School, 220 Lambeth Rd, London SE1 7JY*

Nosema is becoming an increasing problem for our bees, particularly now that we cannot use Fumadil-B. This meeting will provide information and free testing of your bees for Nosema using microscopy. Any member that wishes to have their bees tested should bring along 30 or so freshly dead bees (catch flying bees that are returning to the hive in a polythene bag and place in a fridge overnight to kill humanely). Followed by chat with coffee

and cake. Followed by native wild-flower meadow creation on the Oval Housing Estate for those that want to. Non-members are welcome to come and find out more about LBKA.

### Sunday, 9th March: Native wildflower meadow creation

*13:15 at Outside Oval Tube Station.*

Straight after the monthly meeting, we will be planting a native wildflower meadow (seeds and plug plants) on the Oval House Estate. It should be an enjoyable afternoon of light work and there's a job here for everyone of every ability. Refreshments and all tools/gloves will be provided. If you arrive late just walk West along Kennington Park Road and you'll see us on the green space to the left of the road. More details [here](#).

### Tuesday, 18th March: Experiences of a seasonal bee inspector

*19:30 at Kent House Road Leisure Gardens (opposite Woodbastwick Road) 91a Kent House Road, Sydenham, Kent SE26 5LJ.*

We have been kindly invited by Bromley and Orpington BKA to this talk. David Rudland will talk about his experiences as a local beekeeper with 150 hives and being a seasonal bee inspector.

### Wednesday, 26th March: Spring lecture: Bringing colonies into Spring

*18:30 for 19:00-21:00 at Roots & Shoots, Walnut Tree Walk, London, SE11 6DN.*

David Rudland (FERA Bee Inspector and instructor) will give us a talk and practical demonstration of the importance of bringing colonies out of winter and into the Spring. This will include valuable tips on how to recognise and encourage the productive build up of your colonies. David is a particularly engaging speaker and we are very pleased to be hosting him.

We have limited space, so please e-mail us if you'd like to come. This is a members-

only event, but we are also inviting members of neighbouring associations. Refreshments will be provided.



### Saturday 5th April: Skep-making workshop

10:00-15:00 at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, London SW6 6EA

Learn how to make a bee skep in this practical workshop (<http://bit.ly/MRZhhy>) with Martin Buckle, basket and skep maker. This workshop will ensure you are prepared for swarming season! £40 - booking is essential - call 020 7736 3233 or email [reception@fulhampalace.org](mailto:reception@fulhampalace.org).

### Thursday 10th April: Bee talk and habitat workshop

18:30-20:00 at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, London SW6 6EA

Join Mark Patterson (Groundwork London and LBKA) and Netty Riboux (Groundwork Conservation Officer) for this hands-on evening. Discover how bees sense the world around them, learn about the wide variety of UK bees and find out what you can do to support bees. Includes a practical habitat workshop, making homes for solitary bees, plus a freebie bee pack to encourage bees to your garden.

### Sunday 13th April: Monthly meeting: Swarm prevention and swarm control

11:00-12:00 at Fairley House Junior School, 220 Lambeth Rd, London SE1 7JY

Swarm prevention and swarm control, plus other topics. Followed by chat with coffee and cake. Non-members are welcome to come and find out more about LBKA.

### Committee

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with a member of the committee if you have any questions, requests, suggestions (and offers of help!), but remember that we are all volunteers with busy lives. We are **Karin Courtman** (chair; [chair@lbka.org.uk](mailto:chair@lbka.org.uk)), **Jon Harris** (treasurer; [treasurer@lbka.org.uk](mailto:treasurer@lbka.org.uk)), **Angela Woods** (secretary; 0785 026 3077; [admin@lbka.org.uk](mailto:admin@lbka.org.uk)); **Howard Nichols** (education; [education@lbka.org.uk](mailto:education@lbka.org.uk)), **Aidan Slingsby** (members' services and web; [services@lbka.org.uk](mailto:services@lbka.org.uk) and [webmaster@lbka.org.uk](mailto:webmaster@lbka.org.uk)), **David Hankins** (membership secretary; [membership@lbka.org.uk](mailto:membership@lbka.org.uk)), **Richard Glassborow** (apiaries' manager; [apiaries@lbka.org.uk](mailto:apiaries@lbka.org.uk)) and **Mark Patterson** (forage officer; [forage@lbka.org.uk](mailto:forage@lbka.org.uk)). Our website is <http://www.lbka.org.uk/>.

