



The London Beekeepers' Association LBKA News

March, 2019

As winter is giving way to Spring, we had our second (and final) Winter Lecture at the end of last month on bee venom immunology. If you couldn't make it, Eugene has written it up (p7), along with his Facebook summary. Just before the season starts, we're reminding beekeepers to remain vigilant looking out for the Asian Hornet. Epping Forest Beekeepers' Association have invited us to their [free one-day conference](#) on this subject, we have some guidance on page 4 and Katy Langley (also a member of Epping Forest Beekeepers) has some further information. Part Two of Mark's defence of "silly urban meadows" is on page 11. Plus the regular contributors Richard (p1 and p10), Howard (p6) and Eugene (p15).

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A big thank you to this month's contributors: **Eugene Fahy, Richard Glassborow, Katy Langley, Howard Nichols, Mark Patterson, Mary Walwyn and Sara Ward**. Thanks as usual to **Martin Hudson** for proof-reading it. Would you like to join these esteemed contributors? If so, please contact me.

Happy beekeeping.

Aidan Slingsby, Editor, services@lbka.org.uk

From our Chair

*Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk*

First inspections in February? Yes! The bees don't know it's February but they do know when it's 20°C and some of us were able to take the opportunity to have a thorough look. The general consensus from those I have compared notes with is that most colonies are already quite advanced on their build-up: there are even reports of drones. If we do not have a spell of bad weather we should not be surprised if swarms start to appear in March. So I hope we are all prepared to prevent or manage swarming.

But of course, weather – the local, time-based expression of climate – never has been an easy thing to fore-



Bee on crocus. Photo: Sara Ward.

cast and that is especially true as the climate is changing. One thing I keep in mind is that averages for any weather data seem to vary relatively little year to year so, if at any time they are not close, expect rebalance.

I haven't checked, but my impression is that the temperature average for the preceding 12 months is pretty high at the moment, especially in London. Certainly, according to the Met Office, the provisional UK mean temperature for February was 6.0°C, which is 2.4°C above the 1981-2010 long-term average. That is a lot and makes me think we may yet get compensatory low temperatures, either as extremes or in duration, to bring the average back closer to the trend. Remember the "Beast from the East" last year or interminably long drawn-out cold wet springs. We have to wait to find out, but it does add a note of caution about how we manage our bees, especially if we want to shoo swarm in spring as a major component of our varroa management strategy. Bad weather in the days immediately following a shoo swarm procedure can definitely pose an existential risk to some colonies. But not as big a risk as varroa!

Decisions, decisions, but isn't it one of the attractions of beekeeping: you start off with an interest in honey bees and, before you know it, you are drawn into flowering plants, meteorology, wild bees and indeed the whole natural world. . .

All I would say is, whatever flexibility we may require over external factors outside our control, we can help ourselves by being ready with all the things under our control, e.g. enough kit, etc. But then I say that every year and often fail to do as I say.

Announcements

This is our official place for announcements. If you only read one section of the newsletter, it should be this one!

March Monthly Meeting

The next Monthly Meeting will be on **Sunday 10th March** at **Fairley House Junior School** (220 Lambeth Rd, SE1 7JY) and will be a hands-on microscopy session, in which we will test our bees for signs of nosema. If you'd like to check your bees, bring along around 30 of them which have been humanely killed in a freezer overnight. You can collect them by holding a polythene bag open at the hive entrance to catch returning foragers.

Next month's meeting on 14th April will be the annual swarm control meeting which will include video footage of collection and hiving. In dense urban areas, it is im-



The venue for our monthly meeting – the white door on the left.

portant that we are able to keep our bees under control. We can't always, but we can try. This April meeting will allow us to share tips, advice and experiences to help. This meeting will be in a **new location** ([Hackney City Farm](#)). Thanks to member Ken Hayes for helping set this up.

Natalie's pub pick

This month's social will be on **Tuesday, 26th March** at [Seven Stars, 53 Carey St, WC2A 2JB](#). Dating from 1602, this pub features excellent, reasonably priced home cooking and a resident cat.

2019 BBKA Basic Assessment – Act Now

London Beekeepers Association encourages its members to take the BBKA basic assessment and, as usual, we will run a free course in 2019 and facilitate members wishing to take this assessment. The BBKA requirement for entry is that the applicant has been managing bees for a minimum period of 1 year. The assessment is fairly straightforward and the syllabus can be downloaded free of charge from the BBKA website. Both the BBKA and the LBKA encourages members to take this assessment. It is the beekeeping equivalent of passing a driving test.

Most years at least one member decides to take this assessment after all the arrangements have been made with the BBKA. They are disappointed as we cannot undo and rearrange everything just to accommodate an extra individual. The time to decide to take this is now, not in April or May. Those who are already registered have received electronic winter reading material and the tuition dates have been arranged and notified.

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

The BBKA website should be sufficient to deal with any

queries regarding the assessment. Alternatively, ask another LBKA member who has taken it. Preparation for the Basic is an interesting and sociable way of furthering your beekeeping activities and most people enjoy doing it. It is also often a requirement if intending to keep bees in a public place such as on an allotment.

Prepare for the Asian hornet

As we start a new beekeeping year, we need to continue to be vigilant for the Asian Hornet. If you think you may have sighted one, you should try to send a photo of it to alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk. We've included a handy identification leaflet on page 4.

Also, Epping Forest Beekeepers' Association have invited us to a [free one-day conference](#) on Sunday 24 March at Copped Hall, Epping, when we will explore the threat posed to UK beekeeping and the wider natural environment by the Asian hornet, a non-native invasive species. Five eminent speakers will present their experiences and demonstrate how we can all play a part to prevent the establishment of this serious environmental threat, which is a voracious predator of insects.

The Asian hornet entered France by ship from Asia in 2004 and has now reached the Channel coast. During the last two years it has made fleeting visits to Devon, Cornwall, Hull, Surrey, Hampshire, and Dungeness. Booking for the event is essential and tickets may be reserved at [Eventbrite](#). Tea and home-made cakes will be on sale during intervals, but please bring a packed lunch.

Members wanting bees

We used to [have a list](#) of members who wanted bees.

The committee have decided to "retire" this list, because it didn't really work. We don't usually have nucs available and members who do rarely checked this list. The best way is to let it be known that you want bees by speaking to people who do, or by using the members-only Facebook and/or whatsapp channels of communication.

- **Swarms:** For swarms, please use the LBKA-swarms WhatsApp group (join using the [link is listed here](#)).
- **Nucs:** For nucs, please use the LBKA Bee Banter WhatsApp group (join using the [link listed here](#)) or the members-only [LBKA-Forum](#) Facebook page (ask services@lbka.org.uk to add you if you don't have access).

Swarms will start to be available from late April onwards; nucs a bit later.

Matthew Pelly

We are sad to report that LBKA member Matthew Pelly died in December.

His father Hugh wrote the following:

Matthew Pelly 41, a successful television documentary Producer/Director and cameraman died on 29 December 2018. Growing up with his father's bees in Wiltshire for the past couple of years he has had two colonies in his garden in Peckham, where he delighted in introducing neighbours, friends and particularly children to the arcane craft. The huge crowd that gathered at the church to celebrate his life was testament to his enormous number of friends and how sorely they will miss him.


Correction: Rosybee website

The link we provided to Rosi Rollings' business did not work properly in last month's newsletter. The correct link is [rosybee:plants for bees](#), a website that offers plants, lots of information for helping support bees, and tips for gardeners.

Old announcements from February

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

Upcoming events: We have dates for the Ascot Family Day (Sunday 31 March), for Battersea Park Zoo (Thursday 11 April), and for the Lambeth Country Show 2019 (Sat/Sun 20/21 July 2019) and we will need helpers. We also need helpers at our Introduc-



www.nonnativespecies.org

Produced by Lucy Curran, Claf Bony (NNS), Guy Harris, Mia Brown (National Bee Unit) with assistance from Colette O'Hara, National Biodiversity Data Centre (Ireland) Stuart Roberts (BKAUK)

Asian Hornet

Alert!
Report sightings of this species to:
alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk

Species Description

Scientific name: *Vespa velutina*
AKA: Yellow-legged Hornet
Native to: Asia


Habitat: Nests usually high in trees and man-made structures, sometimes closer to the ground; hunts honey bees, other insects and also feeds on fruit and flowers.

Not easily confused with any other species. Dark brown or black velvety body. Characteristically dark abdomen and yellow tipped legs. Smaller than the native European Hornet.


Introduced to France in 2004 where it has spread rapidly. In 2016 the first UK sighting was confirmed in Gloucestershire. High possibility of introduction through, for example, soil associated with imported plants, cut flowers, fruit, garden items (furniture, plant pots), freight containers, or other untreated timber. The possibility that it could fly across the Channel has not been ruled out.

A highly aggressive predator of native insects. Poses a significant threat to honey bees and other pollinators.


Do not disturb an active nest. Members of the public who suspect they have found an Asian Hornet should send a photo to alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk.



Key ID Features



Asian Hornet Queen
Queens up to 30mm, workers up to 25mm long
Entirely dark brown or black when fully developed with a fine yellow band
Legs brown with characteristic yellow ends



Asian Hornet abdomen is almost entirely dark except for a yellow segment


Asian hornet 'honeying' for honey bees prey

Photos from: J. Hasaun, Rachel Scopes and Nigel Jones, Richard Bell

Similar Species


Asian hornet (*Vespa velutina*) for comparison Actual size

- Queen up to 30mm long, worker up to 25mm long
- Legs yellow at the ends
- Dark brown / black abdomen with a yellow / orange band on 4th segment
- Head dark from above, orange from front
- Dark coloured antennae
- Entirely black velvety thorax
- Never active at night



European hornet (*Vespa crabro*) Actual size


- Queen up to 30mm long, worker up to 30mm long
- Legs brown at the ends
- Yellow abdomen marked with brown on the upper part, not banded
- Head yellow from above, yellow from front
- Yellow antennae
- Thorax black with extensive brown markings
- May be active at night



Roger Burgess

Giant woodwasp (*Ducerus gigas*) Actual size


- Larger than Asian hornet, female up to 45mm long
- Legs yellow
- Distinctive yellow and black banded abdomen
- Long cylindrical body unlike Asian hornet which has an obvious waist
- Long yellow antennae
- Female has an obvious long sting-like appendage (ovipositor) which it uses to lay eggs in trees



© Rhone

Hornet mimic hoverfly (*Vilurcula zonaria*) Actual size


- Abdomen has more yellow stripes than Asian hornet
- Legs darker than Asian hornets
- Only one pair of wings (hornets and wasps have two pairs)
- Large, globular eyes



Dider Devoetere

Median wasp (*Dolichovespula media*) Actual size


- More extensive yellow and orange colouration on abdominal segments than Asian hornet
- Yellow markings on thorax unlike Asian hornet



© Rhone

Field Signs

Active April-November (peak August/September). Mated queens over winter singly or in groups, in various natural and man-made harbours – underneath tree bark in cavities left by beetle larvae, in soil, on ceramic plant pots – potentially any small, well-insulated refuge. Makes very large nests in tall trees in urban and rural areas, but avoids pure stands of conifers. Will use man-made structures (garages, sheds etc.) as nesting sites.



For more information visit:
www.nonnativespecies.org
www.nationalbeehive.com

Alert!
Report sightings of this species to:
alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk

tory Courses on 4-5th and 11-12th May. If you'd like to help contact Martin at events@lbka.org.uk.

Torben Schiffer talk? If anyone would be interested in a talk by Torben Schiffer (University of Wurzburg) on his research on the varroa mite, contact shaywill@fastmail.co.uk.

Old announcements from January

Can you help on our new course for school teachers? If so, contact Martin on events@lbka.org.uk.

Sustainable Queen Rearing: The Bee Improvement and Bee Breeders Association (BIBBA) are running a series of [Queen Rearing courses](#).

Want to sell cut comb in Brixton? Jon Harris knows a shop owner in Brixton looking for cut comb to buy. If anyone has any for sale, contact services@lbka.org.uk.

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.

March's Committee meeting

Here, we keep you up to date with what the committee discuss at our monthly committee meetings (and what keeps us awake at night). Let us know if you can help or have any suggestions that might help.

Aidan Slingsby
services@lbka.org.uk

We started talking about our LBKA apiaries. Elliot is making progress on the LBKA agreement with the new apiary at Regents University, which we plan to start using this year. A former LBKA member who's an experienced beekeeper that moved away, turned up at the LBKA pub social. He's back for 6 months and has volunteered to help at some of the LBKA apiaries. We are approving expenditure on new equipment for LBKA apiaries, including a using a boiler to recover frames. We also have a new volunteer to help at Eden with the apiary and mentoring.

We are still developing our proposals for how to deal with swarm collection this year, and need to get this finalised very soon.

We have a large amount of LBKA honey that we need to sell. We are investigating outlets for doing so. We

Asian Hornet Identification leaflet. Source: [BBKA website](#).

sell LBKA honey at a fixed price, but in some areas, we are being undercut by other local suppliers and this is making it hard to sell honey in some of our original outlets.

We have an increasing number of requests for us to give talks in schools and need to increase our pool of members willing and able to help deliver these. We also have a request for an experienced tutor to teach about beekeeping and we'll ask members whether there is someone suitable.

We agreed to negotiate renewing our storage space at "Big Yellow" when it comes up for renewal on similar terms. It is working well for us.

We agreed to publicise the list of dates and subjects of all LBKA's meetings and events that have been organised by next month.

Last month's Monthly Meeting:

What happened at our meeting last month.

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

As usual the meeting was held at Fairley school on the 2nd Sunday of the month. It was the second meeting of the new year and about 50 members attended. We did not have any visiting beekeepers this month.

The subject was American Foul Brood (AFB) and European Foul Brood (EFB) and the meeting structure took the form of 3 distinct parts. Howard Nichols introduced the topic, Richard Glassborow then spoke about the experience of finding and dealing with EFB in an LBKA apiary last year and, finally, Mark Patterson, former seasonal bee inspector, shared his experiences of searching for and finding these pathogens in colonies and the actions taken. Mark also dealt with the question and answer session at the end.

Introduction

Howard commenced by explaining the nature and life-cycle of these pathogens and gave a simple summary of the signs and treatments. He also explained that apiary hygiene is of the utmost importance but, regardless of the efforts of the beekeeper, these diseases do spread. For several years south east London seems to have had a high level of EFB which further worsened in 2018. 2018 also had more than 1 instance of the relatively rare AFB in London. He explained the nature, progression and transmission of the diseases with Powerpoint

slides. Howard also said that his understanding of EFB in London in 2018 is that, based upon National Bee Unit laboratory analysis, 17 different strains were found to be in existence in the capital. He also mentioned a very experienced beekeeper he knew outside of London who had 5 colonies, 3 of which were found to have EFB in 2018. That particular beekeeper took the decision to have all 5 colonies destroyed so that he can fumigate and sterilise his apiary and equipment then recommence beekeeping operations again in 2019.

Middle part

Richard talked about the LBKA experience of finding EFB at one of its apiaries. He also had Powerpoint slides showing the event, including a rather dramatic picture of a colony being burnt. Richard also addressed the subject of colony destruction if sanctioned by a Bee Inspector or voluntarily opted for by the beekeeper. Those beekeepers keeping bees on roofs would have a problem as a 1 metre square fire pit could not be dug. The only option would be removal for incineration by the Government but at the beekeeper's expense.

Final part

Mark talked to us about his 'in the field' experiences working as a bee inspector. Such work is primarily, but not exclusively, geared towards looking for and treating the foulbrood diseases. He explained how this is done, confirmation of the result and the various treatment options in the event of discovery. Mark also explained some of the statutory matters. As usual there was a lot of discussion about the individual diseases and conditions and a variety of questions asked. Mark dealt with all these questions.

This meeting was the second in a series of meetings and LBKA events concerning diseases over the forthcoming year. In June we will also have a practical Bee Health Day. As a result of these serious diseases being found in such numbers in 2018 the LBKA is trying to make a concentrated effort to bring these issues to its members minds with a view to further educating ourselves as a beekeeping association and improving our awareness and skills of detection. Finally, it is imperative that our colonies are registered with the National Bee Unit so that beekeepers can be notified if such diseases are found in their locality. If you have not registered a new apiary or colony location on the [NBU's 'Beebase' website](#), please do so as soon as possible.

March in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

Every spring is filled with beekeeping expectation. Once the season is underway it becomes diverted and consumed by the unexpected. Despite this fact of beekeeping life it is still good policy to have a beekeeping plan. It need not be overly ambitious, just to learn something new. Last season quite a few of our members had little or no honey harvest due to the prolonged hot weather. Therefore, the plan could be as simple as producing a surplus honey crop this summer. The key to such a strategy is having the maximum number of flying bees at the time of the summer nectar flow. Such a plan would need to incorporate a successful method of swarm control along with the keeping of healthy bees. Thus the simple aspiration of producing a honey surplus is quite challenging and requires both planning and sufficient equipment!

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. We have had an unusually mild winter which included a very warm February. This enabled the bees to commence foraging. At the time of writing it has now returned to more normal weather pattern and my bees have stopped flying again. The former causes the bees to produce more brood and the latter to retreat back to a cluster. Assuming the weather improves then the colony at the end of March should be substantially different from the one at the beginning.

Stores. The main job of 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 bring in mainly 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. This is undoubtedly the most important job for March.

First inspection. The first warm day from the start of March is an opportunity to have a quick look inside the hive if not already done so. 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 14C or more then a detailed colony inspection may be made. Otherwise, leave this until April.

Observe the entrance. If an inspection is not possible, then observing the colony entrance will provide invaluable 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, *prima facie*, 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. The National Bee Unit produces an excellent booklet 'Managing Varroa' which is [available for free download](#). There is also comprehensive information about varroa on the NBU website, including an on line varroa count calculator. www.nationalbeeunit.com Hopefully, we have all treated with Oxalic Acid in the winter and now have healthy emerging bees with a minimum of varroa in the colonies.

Siting your bees. Those who were on the LBKA mentoring schemes last year and have not yet acquired bees (but will 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.

If your bees are dead. 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 important to try to find out why the bees have died. Winter and early spring colony losses seem to average 20% to 30% so you are not alone. It does not always mean it's 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. I sincerely hope that all of us have a productive season and achieve whatever aims and goals we aspire to!

LBKA Winter Lecture: Bee venom immunology

Eugene reports back from our second Winter Lecture of the year.

Eugene Fahy
LBKA member

For our second winter lecture, we were very fortunate to have as our guest speaker Dorothea Grosse-Kreul, a Senior Specialist Nurse for Clinical Immunology & Allergy at King's College Hospital. She has over 20 years' experience treating allergies from pollen to wasp and bee venom. The lecture examined the causes of bee venom allergy and the approach to treatment.

The first reaction to a bee sting is a localised bump on the flesh as the area underneath fills with fluid to make way for white blood cells which help the body fight foreign bodies and infections. If followed by itching, this is termed a systemic reaction. However, anaphylaxis is an acute and severe multi-system reaction to an antigen to which the body has become hypersensitive. Dorothea pointed out that a first ever sting from a bee will not produce anaphylaxis, it can only happen once the body has been sensitised. However, it can happen at any age and even after a lifetime of mild reaction to stings; there are cases of lifelong beekeepers becoming allergic in their 80s. It is possible to have a scratch test to see if you are sensitive but even if you are, there is only a 50% chance that you will go on to develop anaphylaxis. On the other hand, if you test negative for sensitivity, you may still go on to develop it at a later stage.

Most stings only cause a mild, local reaction. Anaphylaxis is very rare, only between 5% and 7.5% of the population will be affected but this is significantly higher for beekeepers. This is because bees are generally reluctant to sting but beekeepers are obviously at higher risk because of their greater contact with bees. The general public are more likely to be stung by wasps and as a result wasp venom allergy is far more common than bee venom allergy. Bee venom allergy gets more publicity because most people cannot readily distinguish a wasp from a honey bee. People arriving at hospital often don't know what has stung them and Dorothea said that despite her experience in treating patients, she was not confident in her ability to tell a bee from a wasp, although she joked that this put her in the minority at the meeting.

There is a checklist of symptoms which indicate that someone who has been stung may be suffering anaphylactic shock: dizziness or feeling faint, acute onset of

breathing difficulties, appearing confused and changes to the skin such as blotching. If one or more of these symptoms are present you should take the following action:

1. Call for help (Dial 999 and mention the word "anaphylaxis" – this is important).
2. Make the person lie down and elevate their legs. This will increase the blood flow to the heart. If you can not easily raise their legs, then lie them down with their knees bent and feet flat on the ground. (An inverted V-shape). Keep them lying down, even if they start to feel better.
3. You can give two antihistamine tablets (even if the package dose says one), this is completely safe and should be done as quickly as possible.
4. Give lots of water to drink.
5. If the person carries an adrenalin auto-injector such as an EpiPen, you can use it, otherwise you should not administer adrenalin as it is extremely dangerous and can cause long-term heart damage.

Immunotherapy takes three years and involves injections, weekly for the first twelve to fifteen weeks and monthly thereafter. The venom dose is increased gradually over this time and the end-dose is equivalent to two bee stings. If you are prescribed an EpiPen, you need to carry two as each pen holds a .3 ml dose but you will need .5 ml to be effective. On allergies more generally, Dorothea said they appeared to be on the rise and one reason advanced is "the hygiene hypothesis". Immunoglobulins or antibodies, which are part of the white blood cells, bind to specific antigens such as bacteria or viruses and help to destroy them. In non-medical terms, we bleach and kill so many germs that the antibodies have nothing to do and become hyper-vigilant attacking the first thing they encounter, leading to extreme allergic reactions.

At the time of German unification, East Germany had very low levels of eczema and allergies generally whereas West Germany, had a lifestyle and allergy levels similar to elsewhere in the developed world. Within ten years levels in the east had risen to equal those in the west and this has been explained by changes in lifestyle, principally use of bleaches and anti-bacterial cleansers.

The meeting finished with some questions and answers and by the end everyone had a better understanding of bee venom allergy and felt confident that we would know what to do in the case of a severe allergic reaction.

Focus on Forage

Mark tells us what's in flower at this time of year. This article is an extract reprinted from two years ago.

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

March is officially the first month of spring for us in the UK, though in London it has felt spring like for several weeks now. The first of the spring flowers are already putting on a colourful show of yellows, purples and shades of white. **Snowdrops** are starting to pass their best, having flowered in large numbers since late January. The early flowering **crocus** species are currently looking at their best across most of London. The later flowering large flowered crocus varieties are just starting to join the display too. These and other spring bulbous plants include **Winter Aconite**, **Anemone blanda**, **Squill** and **Muscari**. These are valuable early sources of pollen for bees.

Garden plants important to bees this month include the **Hellebores** (the hybrid Hellebores in my garden are particularly popular with bees at the moment), **Pulmonaria** and **Wallflowers**. Both the biennial bedding wallflowers and short lived perennial varieties are attractive to bees, but it's the Everlasting Wallflower *Bowles Mauve* that is flowering best at present; the others will put on a fantastic show towards the end of March and into April.

Several Spring flowering trees are important to bees and these include **White Poplar**, **Willow**, and **Hazel**. The large Hazel tree in my apiary has been flowering since January but is at its peak now. The willow and **white beam** catkins are just starting to open. One of the best small willows for gardens is **Salix caprea Kilmarnock** which is a pussy willow type with large fluffy catkins which become covered in bright lemon yellow pollen. All manner of bees adore it. Last spring whilst cycling through Archbishops Park *en route* to the LBKA monthly meeting, I passed a trio of these dwarf weeping trees which were covered in **honey bees**, **Ashy Mining bees**, **Painted Mining bees** and several **bumblebees**. These trees all have pollen with a high protein and fatty acids content valuable to bees rearing brood and for queens fattening up ready to begin laying.

Shrubs flowering this month attractive to bees include **flowering currant**, **Sarcococca**, **blackthorn**, **flowering quince** and **camelia**. At last month's RHS early Spring Flower Show I bought 2 new camelias for my garden, a light pink one and a dark pinkie red one called "Adeyaka". Both are open single flowered varieties which flower from Late February through to Early May and are "self cleaning" varieties which mean the blooms drop as soon as they are pollinated, or if the



Primrose.



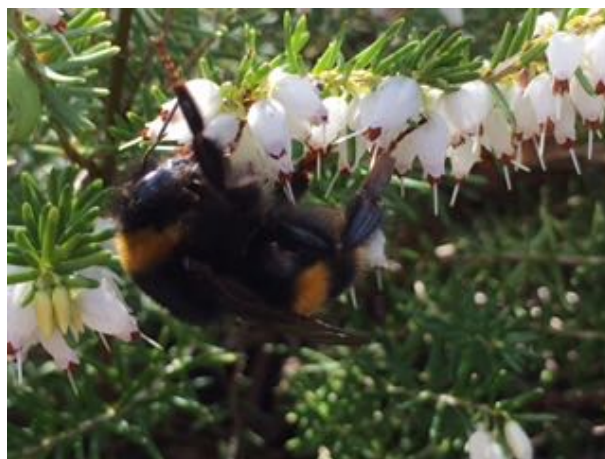
Winter aconite.



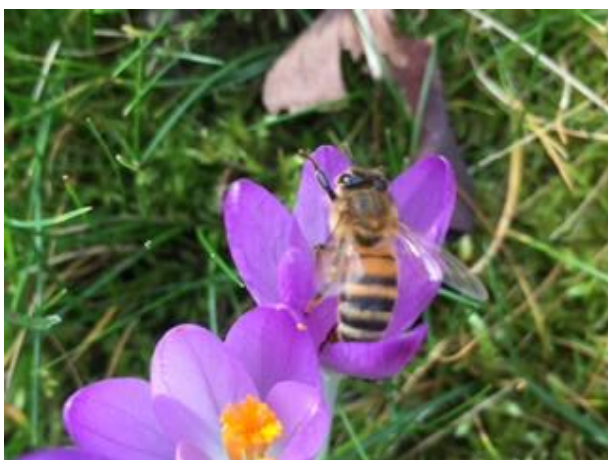
Wild damson.



Buff tailed queen on crocus.



Buff tailed queen on winter heather.



Honey bee on crocus.

blooms become frosted resulting in a neat looking shrub without the tainted frost damaged petals which can look unsightly.

Other flowers making an appearance include **lesser celandine**, **sweet violet**, **cowslip**, **primrose**, **white deadnettle**, **bugle**, **ground ivy** and the first of the **Spanish bluebells** (*Hyacinthoides Hispanica*) whose blue-green pollen Honey bees will collect. white dead-nettle in particular is a valuable wild plant for bumble bees and some of the longer-tongued solitary bees. Its pollen is rich in protein and fats.

Speaking of wild bees, there are reports coming in from across the country over the past month with the first sightings of spring wild bees. This year some species have begun to appear very early indeed with reports of **Hairy Footed Flower bee**, **Painted Mining bee** and many **bumblebee queens** being spotted in and around the capital. In the last week of February I discovered 7 **Buff Tailed queens** alongside a **Garden bumblebee queen** and an **Early bumblebee queen** foraging on crocus blooms not far from my house.

I'm hoping that the very cold snaps we've had this winter will benefit my fruit trees. Most fruiting trees perform best when they have been subjected to a good frosting over the winter. A very cold snap will kill

off many pathogens and insect pests which can attack the tree and the difference in temperature triggers hormones and activates genes in the plant tissues important in the formation of flower buds. Temperatures in my garden in December and January reached lows of minus 10 Celsius so with luck this spring will be a good one for Apple, Pear and Plum blossom resulting in a bounty of nectar for bees in March through to May and a bumper fruit crop in late summer.

Jobs in the garden

This time of year presents us with the last opportunity to lift and divide herbaceous perennials before they start to put on significant growth. I've just lifted and split my **Helleniums**, **hardy geraniums**, **Japanese anemones** and **sedum spectable**.

Plant out herbaceous perennials that were grown from seed or cuttings last year. Get them in the ground now so they have time to spread out their roots ahead of the coming growing season. Less hardy plants may still require protection with fleece. Have fleece available to protect the blooms of soft fruits. My **peach** and **nectarine** buds are starting to open – will I get any fruit this year?

Early March is the last opportunity to prune apples and pears. Stone fruits such as peach, plum and apricot should be pruned in late summer. When pruning apples and pear resist the urge to cut back too much growth which the trees respond to by putting on excess vigorous regrowth. Unlike plum and other stone fruits which flower on the previous year's wood, Pip fruits require 2 year old material to develop flower/fruit buds.



You don't want bees flying around the back of a van. You don't want bees flying around the back of a van.



Yes, central London.

LBKA Apiaries

News from LBKA's apiaries.

*Richard Glassborow
(Acting) Apiary Officer*

February has been a month of bee movies for LBKA apiaries.

Those of you on our WhatsApp Bee Banter group may have followed some of the logistics involved as we used the platform to coordinate help from members in the collection of three colonies of bees from Romford and delivery to the Brockwell Park teaching apiary.

Just a couple of weeks before that we moved the bees in our Holland Park apiary from the arcade roof to a new site 400 metres away in a beautiful and spacious lightly wooded meadow.

The roof-top apiary at Holland Park was beautiful but, to be honest, it had never worked as a teaching apiary as we hoped because we had to limit the number of people on it to comply with the safety loading of the old structure. The new site not only has no such re-



Testing the prototype hive carrier promised in the risk assessment. We rejected a proprietary one on the grounds of poor design and poor welding quality. The handles shown here cost considerably less than £55!

strictions but is genuinely spacious in a way I had never expected would be possible in London. It is just like the books say an apiary should be.

Before being allowed to implement this move, Mark Patterson and I had to produce the mother of all Risk Assessments and Method Statements. For understandable reasons, the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea is very risk averse. What wasn't anticipated in the risk assessment was a near flat battery in the electric cart supplied by RBKC! Sometimes you just have to laugh.

Our thanks to Mark Patterson who has put his considerable experience of H&S expectations and requirements working with city corporations, community projects and special needs schools, and many hours of work into developing the Risk assessment for the new apiary and the move, not to mention the Agreement between LBKA and RBKC. These documents will inform an upgrade of all our teaching apiaries and generic versions will be generated as templates for use by our members who have apiaries on host sites. Even if you have, or are thinking of having a more informal arrangement with an apiary host, we advise you to have a look at these when they become available on the web site. They will be templates: you do not have to use it all but a lot of thought has gone into them based on actual, practical experience. Dealing with issues can be so much easier if there is some contingency planning in place.



An inexpensive native meadow I created in 2014 behind Television Centre in White City, West London. This meadow was sown from seed using a bespoke seed blend which I designed. The mix had a higher than normal percentage of wild flowers to grasses as residents wanted a colourful display. Over 30 species including 12 annuals and biennials to provide interest in the initial 2 years were succeeded by 23 perennials and 11 fine native grasses.

In Defence of "Silly Urban Meadows" (Part Two)

This is Part Two of Mark's article In this article – reprinted from [Mark's personal blog](#) – in which he addresses some misunderstandings about urban meadows and annual flower mixes and explains how they play an important role in providing for London's many pollinators. See last month's issue for Part One and look out for the final Part next month!

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

The value to pollinators

Whilst it's generally true that perennial plants produce more pollen and nectar, some flower earlier in the season than annuals and are better at attracting and supporting long term populations of bees which form large nesting aggregations. Many of the annual species included in these mixes are also among the top most attractive plants to bees. Borage, for instance, frequently comes out as the number one best plant for Honey Bees, Phacelia is among the best annuals for Bumblebees. Field Poppy has a very high protein content in its pollen and is very useful to Honey and Bumblebees. Annuals like Corn Flower, forget-me-not and Poached Egg plant are highly attractive to a wide range of bees. The humble Pot Marigold often found in these mixes is



*In the first Year the White City meadow produced a display including field /emphpoppy, **cornflower**, **corn cockle**, **corn chamomile**, **field marigold** before the **campions**, **scabious**, **Knapweeds** and **Oxe-eye Daisy** took over in subsequent years.*

incredibly popular with tiny *Lasioglossum* and *Hylaeus* solitary bees. These mixes often also contain biennials – plants which live for 2 seasons and flower in their second year. Biennials like *Mullein* and *Echium* are among the best plants for bees. Many Bumblebee and solitary bees prefer these plants over perennials. There are several species of bee which feed almost exclusively on annuals which these mixes can cater for. They include the *Vipers Bugloss* *Mason Bee* and brassica family specialists.

The definitive guide to planting for bees, 'Plants for Bees' published by the International Bee Research Association, lists a great many annuals as being of importance to bees. This book has to be one of the most well researched and evidence-based guides to planting for bees.

One, if not the best, informal annual mixes for pollinators is the flower power mix by FlowerScapes Ltd. In my own trials comparing it to other similar mixtures, this mix came out on top as the best. The creators of the Mix recently won a DEFRA bees needs award for their improvement of the University of Sussex campus using their mix to provide habitat for pollinators. Their seed blend contains 40 annual species, is based on 20 years of research into pollinator flower preferences conducted in Germany, and the mix is formulated by a Honey Bee researcher and her Botanist husband – who was former head of the Millennium Seed Bank at Royal Botanical Gardens Kew. No wonder it's so good when it's been put together by such experts in their respective fields. People who are quick to dismiss them and slag them off, typically have weak or no credentials in the same field.

For more on informal annual mixes see my blog [a comparison of annual seed mixtures](#).



Vipers Bugloss flowering in the White City Meadow behind Television Centre.

Proper Meadows

Now let's move on to real meadows. These are not full of lousy annuals but are predominantly perennial grasses and flowers. A true meadow is typically 70-80% grasses and 20-30% flowers, most of which are perennial and flower year after year. In the last 100 years we've lost 98% of our flower-rich meadows in the UK. These above all other habitats are our most important for insect pollinators. Many nationally and threatened species of bee, butterfly and pollinating beetle rely on meadows for their survival. Sadly meadows do not receive the kudos and protection they deserve. They lack the same status as ancient woodlands but in terms of pollinators they are our most treasured habitats.

Like annual mixtures, meadows can be quick to establish and usually at low cost. Again, ground preparation is critical. There are 3 main methods of establishing a meadow. The first is to simply cease cutting the grass as frequently allowing plants to naturally colonise. This can take a long time and look unsightly and unmanaged. In London Borough of Wandsworth new acid grassland meadows have been created by simply removing the upper inches of soil and existing grass turf to expose the seed bank beneath and allowing natural colonisation and succession to take place. The result is that, on Tooting and Wandsworth Commons, blankets of white Clover, Birds Foot Trefoil, Scabious, Knapweed, Hawks beads and Red Bartsia now flourish. The Council has saved considerable funds by only cutting the grasslands once per year and, aside from the ini-



The urban meadow at Inner Temple Gardens



Creating an urban meadow in Ealing. March 2018 and ground has been cleared ready to sow a new native meadow on the Windmill Park Estate. This area needed further weeding prior to sowing because the contractor failed to follow the specification I wrote and did not remove all the Dandelions and other coarse perennial weeds.

tial soil and turf removal, has not had any input into the meadows. The net cost was zero compared to a business-as-usual mowing regime.

A case study undertaken by Glasgow University on conversion of regularly mown amenity grass to rough grassland via reduced mowing in Sheffield demonstrated savings of £6,500 per acre per year in estate maintenance costs (greening the grey report).

The above method took several years to establish but was ultimately successful. Meadows can be achieved a lot quicker, with some input at the beginning.

Removal of turf and sowing with a seed mixture containing some annuals will result in some colour in the initial year within 2-3 months of sowing and, as the years go by, the annuals will disappear and perennial flowers will spread. With appropriate once- or twice-yearly cuts, these meadows are easy to manage and have huge cost savings. In recent years I've created successful urban meadows from seed at White City Estate behind the old BBC Television Centre and on housing estates in Ealing. Both of these meadows were 200-400



Corporate volunteers from Cross Rail assisting the London Beekeepers Association to plug plant a native meadow on the Isle of Dogs near Canary Wharf. This meadow habitat is home to a UK BAP priority bee species and 3 Local BAP bees species which this meadow will support.

m² in area and cost less than £500 to create (including removal of turf, cultivating the soil, purchase of a bespoke designed seed mix and sowing). They cost less than £100 per year to maintain where before the regular grass cutting was more than double this. In the long term these meadows bring cost savings to the local authority. Meadows on larger scales cost even less as there is a reduced cost associated with travel time, Machine maintenance and larger areas can use larger machines which work faster. Whilst there is often some additional cost of maintenance of the cutting blades associated with cutting longer grass in meadows this can be reduced or even offset by investing in better quality blades, adjusting the cutting height of the blades and the speed at which it is cut.

Other methods of establishing meadows include the use of plug or pot grown plants introduced directly into existing turf often in combination with the sowing of Yellow Rattle – a hemiparasitic flowering plant that weakens the grass sward allowing the flowers a chance to compete. This is a more expensive method of creating a meadow and costs 10 times the cost of establishing via seed but with more instantaneous results. This is the method I used in improving meadow habitats at Isle of Dogs in East London where I lead a planting project to restore flower rich meadows. As part of this project I included training of volunteers in meadow management including the use of traditional Scythes. The result is a flower rich habitat supporting UK BAP priority bumblebees with maintenance costing the sum of tea and biscuits for volunteers.

When creating native meadows it is important to manage the expectations of the public. I've often come across scenarios where Councils or housing estate managers have consulted the community about replacing regularly mown grassed areas with meadows and, during the consultation, colourful informal annual mixes or mixed planting schemes like those of the Olympic Park have been shown. This misrepresentation will un-



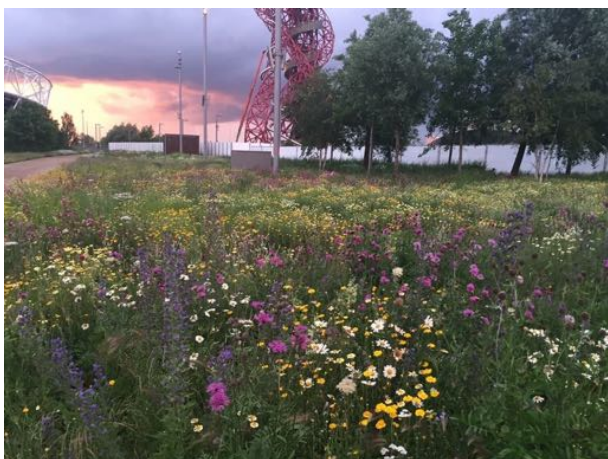
Yellow Rattle – a hemiparasite of course grasses. Here seen growing among a small meadow on a social housing estate in Acton, West London. This is a useful species to include in plug planted meadows as the plant weakens the grasses allowing the wild flowers to compete for space and flourish. It is also a fantastic plant for bumblebees.

doubtedly lead to disappointment as this is not how a native meadow looks. Native meadows flower from March (Cocksfoot and cuckoo flower are often the first flowers) through to late summer, which is when they should be cut for hay and the cuttings removed. For half of the year they bear little flowering interest, and expectations need to be managed so that people are aware that they will look pretty for half the year but drabber for the remainder. Managing the public's expectations and educating them about how and why meadows need this form of management can go a long way to ensuring success.

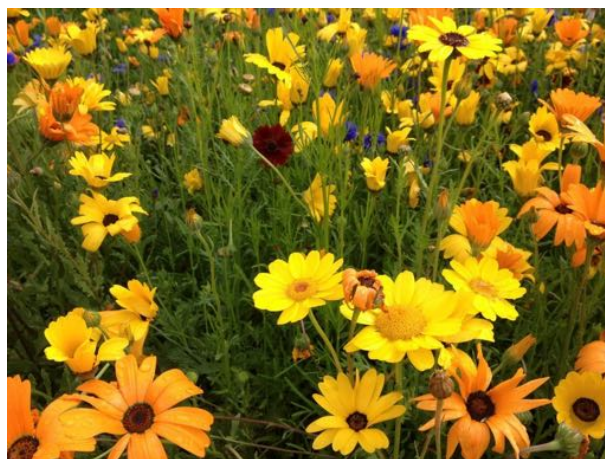
Extravagant meadows

In recent years we've seen an explosion of very fancy meadow-type planting schemes nationally, but none more lavish and ambitious than those of the Olympic Park in Stratford and Burgess Park in London Borough of Southwark.

In the Case of the Olympic Park planting scheme, the planting selections and ground specification was designed by Professor of Plant Sciences Nigel Dunnet (who also designed the award winning gardens at the Barbican centre) and included many of his propriety 'pictorial meadows' mixtures. Other mixtures used such as the 'going for gold' mix were designed specifically



Fabulously extravagant perennial meadows at the Olympic Park in Stratford! A haven for bees and other pollinators.



It wasn't just the athletes that scored Gold at the 2012 Games. Nigel Dunnet deserves a gold medal for his outstanding landscaping skills.



"Going for gold" planting during the 2012 games.



A Brown Banded Carder bee. Photo credit: Bex Cartwright.

for the Olympic park to reflect the national desire to achieve gold, not just in the sporting activities but in setting the gold standard for the most environmentally sustainable Olympics ever held.

The Olympic Park planting schemes were expensive – expensive because the soil had to be created for the plants to be grown in. The entire area of the park was formerly industrial brownfield land and the reclamation of the site was not cheap. The planting design was for annuals in the initial years which would provide colourful displays at the specific time of year when the games would be held. But they were also designed to be succeeded by native perennial wild flowers and some areas also incorporated many non-native species which readily naturalise to mimic the brownfield plant communities often of importance to pollinators. The result, six years after the Games, is a park brimming with plants providing valued habitats for threatened pollinators.

Among the Park's most important inhabitants are the rare Brown Banded Carder Bee and Shrillock Carder Bee. These are two of the UK's most threatened Bumblebees, having been subject to rapid decline as a result of the loss of their preferred habitat - flower rich meadows. In conversations with Bumblebee expert Bex Cartwright from the Bumblebee Conservation Trust, Bex has told

me that some of the best sites for these rare and critically threatened bees are former brownfield sites like the Olympic Park. These bees need a rough sward including rank grassy areas and an abundance and diverse range of flowers to support their populations throughout the late spring to late summer. Most flowering trees and shrubs are spring flowering and offer nothing to support these summer flying pollinators.

Both these rare bees are found within the Olympic Park which has catered for their very specific needs. Brown Banded Carder Bee needs habitat in the magnitude of 10km² of appropriate meadows to sustain viable local populations and the Olympic Park achieves this. No amount of planting flowering trees will help this critically threatened species.

Next month, Mark will conclude his musings on this subject by describing the importance of thoughtful meadow planting for maintaining suitable habitats for some of our rarest pollinators, and a comparison of the costs of meadow or tree-planting.

Asian hornets

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

*Katy Langley from
Epping Forest and LBKA Member*

Asian hornet queens emerge from hibernation once the weather warms up to 15°C across five consecutive days. This means now! Foundress queens can only feed on nectar and have a preference for single-flowering camellias, so please keep a look out. The first one has already been spotted in Jersey.

We will have no idea if there are Asian hornet in London if we don't look for them. [Download the AH Watch App](#) for full identification details, including commonly misidentified insects, and how to report sightings.

Facebook (In)digest(ion)

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

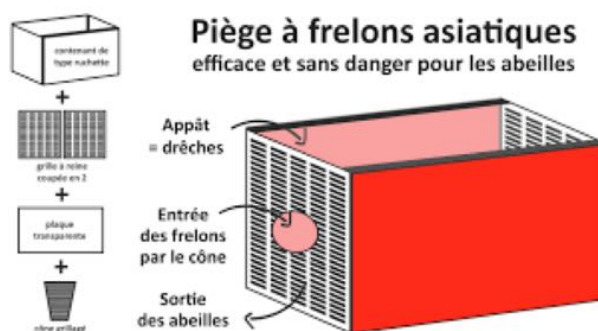
*Eugene Fahy
LBKA Member*

Perhaps the unseasonably fine weather meant that beekeepers spent more time with social insects rather than on social media. Whatever the reason, there were comparatively few posts this month. Mark Anthony Patterson (MAP) [highlighted an article](#) on research into how different bees forage in cities. It provoked a lively discussion on differing sources of forage for honeybees and solitary bees.

Angela Wood [shared a link to a Guardian story](#) with a tabloid sounding headline "World's largest bee, missing for 38 years, found in Indonesia". Not as the headline suggests, an errant giant bombus on a 38 year quest but a species known as Wallace's giant bee, which can



Asian hornet on single-flowering camellia



Mary Walwyn found this Asian Hornet trap designed by Jean-Pierre Thomain which tries to at least partially address the problem of traps catching other beneficial insects. The box has queen excluders fitted at each end, so other bees and insects can escape. The hornet enters via the cone firmly set in excluders so hornet cannot exit out again. It has a clear perspex top that is well secured. It is baited with honey in spring and the hornets that are caught can be put in the freezer or in a tank of water to kill.

measure up to 4cm and was feared extinct. A single female was rediscovered on the Indonesian islands of the North Moluccas, living inside a termites' nest. MAP also [uploaded two helpful documents](#), anyone keeping bees on land owned by someone else will find the Beekeeping agreement useful. The Risk Assessment template – used by the LBKA at all our apiaries – will be useful to anyone keeping bees on or near to public land.

Finally, in more than once sense of the word, Jonathan Lingham [posted a link on the death of John Haynes](#), founder of the Haynes Publishing Group, famous for its car maintenance guides with detailed photographs but also the more recent and excellently illustrated, Haynes Bee Manual: The Complete Step-by-step Guide to Keeping Bees. With apologies to Douglas Adams fans, "so long and thanks for all the pics".

Guest Blog

I'd like to feature a guest blog article from a member every month here. If you write a blog, I'd love to be able to reuse your content here (no extra effort for you!) Please let me know on services@lbka.org.uk.

Members' marketplace

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

Emily Abbott: I run Hive & Keeper Ltd a company that sells single apiary/harvest honeys from small scale beekeepers around the country. Jars are labelled with the honey's main flavour, the name of the beekeeper and where the apiary is. Hive & Keeper currently works with about 30 keepers and your honey would be enjoyed by people across the country. Let me know if you have honey you want to sell, but don't want to jar and sell it yourself. We buy 30lb buckets (a minimum of 3). Check out <http://www.hiveandkeeper.com/> or email emily@hiveandkeeper.com.

Kyle Moreland: I have 2 empty hives I am looking to fill if anyone has a swarm or colony to split; I am looking to get a colony/nuc started. I can travel/collect as needed and am home during the day. Contact me on kyle@marmionroad.plus.com.

Upcoming events

Sunday 10th March: Microscopy and Nosema Testing.

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

A hands-on practical session with microscopes for testing your bees for nosema. Bring along about 30 of your bees which have been humanely killed in a freezer overnight. Followed by the usual hot drinks, cake and chat. Meetings are for members only, but you're wel-

come to come as a guest to find out more about our association.

Sunday, 24th March: Prepare for the Asian hornet

at Copped Hall, Crown Hill, Epping, CM16 5HR

Epping Forest Beekeepers' Association are organising a free one-day conference ([web registration required](#)) where we will explore the threat posed to UK beekeeping and the wider natural environment by the Asian hornet, a non-native invasive species. Five eminent speakers will present their experiences and demonstrate how we can all play a part to prevent the establishment of this serious environmental threat, which is a voracious predator of insects.

Tuesday 26th March: Monthly Pub Social

from 18:30 at Seven Stars 53 Carey St, WC2A 2JB.

Dating from 1602, this pub features excellent, reasonably priced home cooking and a resident cat.

Sunday 14th April: Swarm control

11:00-13:00 at Hackney City Farm (1a Goldsmiths Row, London, E2 8QA).

Learn about swarming and exchange information and tip. Note the new venue for this month. Followed by the usual hot drinks, cake and chat. This meeting is hosted by member Ken Hayes. It will be in the Straw Bale Building, which you can get to through the first gate on the left or the cafe's terrace. Meetings are for members only, but you're welcome to come as a guest to find out more about our association.

Committee

Please do not hesitate to get in touch with a member of the committee if you have any questions, requests, suggestions. We are:

- **Chair:** Richard Glassborow, chair@lbka.org.uk
- **Treasurer:** David Hankins, treasurer@lbka.org.uk
- **Secretary:** Natalie Cotton, admin@lbka.org.uk
- **Education:** Howard Nichols education@lbka.org.uk
- **Membership:** Aidan Slingsby, services@lbka.org.uk
- **Resources:** Tristram Sutton, resources@lbka.org.uk
- **Development:** Simon Saville, development@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Elliot Hodges, mentor@lbka.org.uk
- **Events:** Martin Hudson, events@lbka.org.uk

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

