



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

February, 2022

We have had two really interesting, challenging and thought-provoking Winter Lectures by Torben Schiffer. If you missed them, Martin has summarised the best bits for the first of these and will do so for the other in next month's Newsletter. You can also watch them on [our website](#).

Also a reminder of LBKA's Pollinator Fund (p3), LBKA's education offerings (p5), and winter lectures (p3).

Thanks to Martin, Richard and Howard for their articles and thanks for all those who have help provide content. We want this newsletter to reflect our members, so please do add your perspective.

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Thank you to this month's contributors: **Lucie Chaumeton, Richard Glassborow, Geoff Hood, Martin Hudson, Eugene McConville, Howard Nichols, Mark Patterson, Simon Saville and Giovanni Selvaticus**. Would you like to join these esteemed contributors? If so, contact me.

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

From our Chair

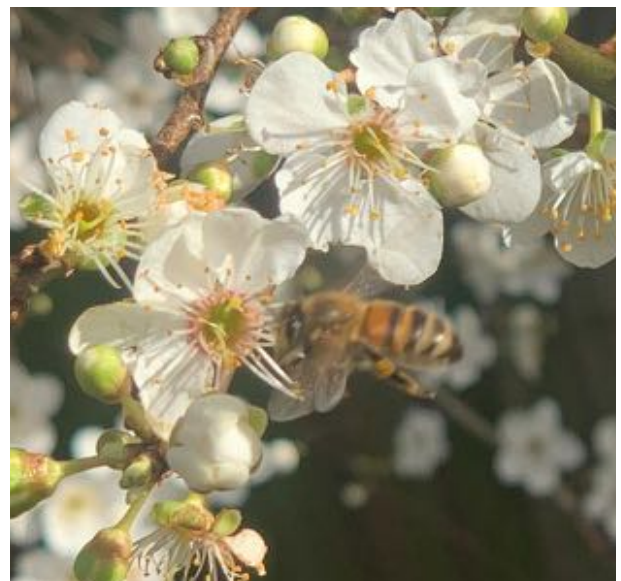
Richard Glassborow
chair@lbka.org.uk

While bees have their beeline the road is not always so straight for beekeepers or, indeed beekeeping associations.

It seems there may be a bit of a sea change at Holland Park, brought about by changes in personnel within the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, owners of the Park. As a result there is no longer anybody there actually aware of all the work our Association has been doing over the years, starting with getting a large neglected apiary and its swarmy feral offspring under control, to supporting the Borough's Bee super-highway initiative with leaflets, seeds, honey, talks and open days, not to mention the hugely successful School Visits (including revenue) we brought to the Park with our partners, School Food Matters.

One of the manifestations of this sea change is loss of storage space in the nearby greenhouses.

To be fair, there is no question of blame here but it is frustrating to say the least to fall foul of the reaction against honey bees when we are probably doing more than anybody to raise awareness of the London Bee Situation and we had such high hopes for Holland



Spotted by Giovanni: Sign of spring. . . Photo and caption: Giovanni Selvaticus.



Going... going...



Good news for stag beetles at Holland Park



Gone!



Spring will see an abundance of flowering plants at Holland Park

Park keeping honey bees within an exemplary biodiverse environment, a sort of invertebrate safari park.

Hopefully this is just a bump in the road and we can get back on track, stronger than ever. In the meantime, the willingness and speed with which a band of volunteers convened to move a large amount of equipment on a midweek afternoon was testament to the LBKA and the values it promotes. Take a bow, Holland Park Team.

Stay well.

Announcements

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

February's online Monthly Meeting and Pub Social

February's Monthly Meeting will on **Sunday 13th February** at 11:00 at the usual Zoom link (in the [Members' Area](#) and in your email). It will be delivered by special guest speaker, **Bob Smith**. Bob is from Medway Beekeepers and a former Bee Inspector and Basic assessor to LBKA. The meeting will be on the subject of "Varroa Control 2022: spoilt for choice". Now with 15 VMD-Approved varroacides, plus multiple application methods, this session will be about how to make good choices and stay safe!

March's Monthly Meeting will be on swarm management on **Sunday 13th March**.

The Pub Social this month will be on **Tuesday 22nd February** from 18:30 onwards at the **Crown & Anchor**, 246 Brixton Road, SW9 6AQ. A large and never

crowded pub with decent food and an excellent selection of beers. About 10 mins from Stockwell, Brixton or Oval Tube stations. Thanks to Katharina Bielenberg for suggesting and booking it!

Exciting opportunity at Battersea Park Children's Zoo

We have been in discussion with the Zoo about the possibility of establishing an LBKA apiary there. It's early days, but we are excited that this could be a place to showcase LBKA's activities and to talk about the [London Bee Situation](#). The Zoo has around 100,000 visitors each year, so this could be really significant.

To get this started, we need volunteers to help set up the apiary, and then manage it on an ongoing basis. If you are interested in any way, please contact Simon Saville at admin@lbka.org.uk.

LBKA's Pollinator Fund

Don't forget about LBKA's Pollinator Fund!

The LBKA Pollinator Fund operates all year round, with grants of up to £1,000 available for full- or part-funded projects that have London pollinators at their heart. Applications are sought from groups such as schools, allotment organisations, tenant & residents associations, horticultural societies, and other small charities. So if you are a member of such an organisation which is developing plans, or just has a "wish list" of projects that might align with LBKA's aims, **please contact treasurer@lbka.org.uk for a Pollinator Fund guidance document and application form.**

My bike for butterflies

Our very own Simon Saville is giving a talk about butterflies and his challenge of cycling from Land's End to John O'Groats, in which he cycled 1,200 miles to raise over £33,000 for Butterfly Conservation. The journey took 30 days and included visiting as many nature reserves and green spaces as he could.

You can buy tickets at £5 (proceeds split between Bell House and Butterfly Conservation) for the talk on 24th February at 7pm.

[Book here](#) for the event on Thursday 24th February at 7pm at Bell House.

Or, you can [watch a YouTube recording](#) of the same talk now.

Winter Lectures

A reminder of the upcoming Winter Lectures which will be delivered over Zoom (links will be sent to members in advance). We had two excellent ones from Torben Schiffer, links to the recording of which can be found in the [members' area](#).

Wednesday 16th February, at 1830: "Varroa-resistant Honeybees". This lecture will be delivered by Professor Stephen Martin from University of Salford, and will focus on the various tolerant mechanisms iden-

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 ferns, furniture, plant pots, freight containers, or even 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 30 mm, workers up to 23 mm long
 Entirely dark brown or black velvety body, legs and head with a few yellow bands
 Legs brown with characteristic yellow ends

Asian Hornet vs European Hornet
 Asian Hornet abdomen is almost entirely dark except for 4th abdominal segment
 Asian Hornet: 'tweaking' for honey bee prey

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 35mm 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

Giant woodwasp (*Dacnusa 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 stinging-like appendage (ovipositor) which it uses to lay eggs in trees

Hornet mimic hoverfly (*Volucella zonaria*)
 Actual size
 • Abdomen has more yellow stripes than Asian hornet
 • Legs darker than Asian hornet
 • Only one pair of wings (hornets and wasps have two pairs)
 • Large, globular eyes

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

Field Signs
 Active April–November (peak August/September). Mated queens over winter singly or in groups, in various natural and man-made hollows – 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.nationalbeehiveunit.com

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

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



Battersea Children's Zoo.

tified, and how some honey bee populations in Brazil and parts of Africa, USA and UK all appear to have evolved similar ways to combat the Varroa mite.

Wednesday 23rd March at 18:30: "Swarming – oops my bees have swarmed". This is the second lecture this winter from Clare Densley & Martin Hahn from Buckfast Abbey. Hopefully it will be a timely reminder of what's just ahead of us, full of useful tips to help us identify the signs of swarm preparation and mitigate the risk of swarming, while working with the bees' natural instinct for colony reproduction. Surely our bees won't swarm before we hear this talk, will they...?

Wednesday 20th April at 18:30: "Simple Queen Rearing". A final outing for the season from the team at Buckfast Abbey. They'll be describing easy ways to propagate lovely queens without the need to graft or invest in cup kit systems. Doubtless there'll be some admissions of failure too, and more anecdotal evidence that the bees don't always do what we want them to!

Please put those dates in your diaries, and look out for Zoom invitations by email closer to the time.

LBKA videos

Just a reminder that videos of many of our Winter Lectures, Monthly Meetings and various other stuff can be found in the [Members' Area of the website](#).

LBKA Courses in 2022

Our plans for our beekeeping courses are taking shape. We are planning four evening theory session delivered over Zoom for 60 participants, followed up with an April/May weekend of practical beekeeping skills, followed up with our mentorship programme.

LBKA members will be the first to know when we open for booking

Old announcements from January

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



Instagram post: Faecal deposits such as this are a often a sign of nosema.

Instagram: Please keep sending your bee related pictures to Lucie at instagram@lbka.org.uk or share them with your authorisation to publish on the Bee Banter WhatsApp group. And if you are on Insta do follow [@londonbeekeepersassociation](https://www.instagram.com/londonbeekeepersassociation).

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.

February's Committee meeting

Here, we keep you up to date with what the committee discusses 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

This month's meeting was mainly about updates on the various activities being planned. These included news about our current position regarding Holland Park, this year's School Food Matters programmes, some new potential LBKA or affiliated apiary sites including an opportunity at Battersea Children's Zoo (p4), repairs at



Spotted by Lucie: After 24h of Apivar, I can't help thinking that the Dec oxalic sublimation didn't work somehow. . . My study group members are having a lot of similar issues. Photo and caption: Lucie Chaumeton.

the Eden apiary, the remaining Winter Lectures, some equipment repairs and plans to provide documentation for the safe use of LBKA's electric extractors for members.

Education Matters

This important announcement is repeated from last month.

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

2022 BBKA Basic Assessment

Both the BBKA and London Beekeepers Association encourage members to take the BBKA basic assessment where possible. The BBKA requirement for entry is that the applicant has been managing bees for a minimum period of 1 year and is a BBKA member. The assessment is fairly straightforward and the syllabus can be downloaded free of charge from the BBKA website. Follow the dropdown menu for "Members" then "examinations and assessments". The cost is £20 and entry forms can also be downloaded at the same time.

Any LBKA member who has been managing bees for a



Instagram post: Waxmoth moved into this hive after the colony died and the hive couldn't be removed or sealed for several years. The larva have devoured the beeswax inside, and are now pupating inside white cocoons.

minimum of 12 months and wishes to take this assessment please confirm by email to education@lbka.org.uk. I will then be able to let you have some electronic course notes to read at your leisure over the winter months. Two members have already notified their interest. The BBKA website should be sufficient to deal with any queries regarding the assessment. Alternatively, ask another LBKA member who has taken it. Preparation for the Basic is an interesting way of continuing your beekeeping activities through the winter months. Even if you have been keeping bees for several years but not previously taken the assessment then please do seriously consider taking it in 2022. It is well worth the effort.

London Beekeepers Association will also run a revision course in the spring for members wishing to take the examination. This is likely to last for 3 evenings (2 hours per evening) in early April. The assessment is both practical and simple oral questions. It lasts about 1 hour. We cover the theory on the revision nights and, for those wanting it, also offer a practical session at an apiary beforehand.

The assessment is not difficult, is within the capabilities of anyone who has been handling bees for 12 months and who is willing to download the syllabus and undertake some background reading. We also supply free course notes in electronic format.

2022 BBKA Modular examinations

We are running a 3 evening Module 1 revision course (dates to be decided) in February 2022.



Spotted by Richard: Winter flowers for (all) winter bees. *Lonicera fragrantissima* is one of my must-have garden plants. 31st January, 8.3° C. Photo and caption: Richard Glassborow.

These are written examinations, each on a different aspect of beekeeping, and will be held in March 2022. The LBKA usually offers tuition to members wanting to take one of these examinations and will continue to do so this winter. A lot of information is on the BBKA website. Anyone who is interested in developing their beekeeping knowledge by this route should first look at the BBKA website under the education section. There is a lot of information including a FAQ factsheet. Simply enter "module" in the search engine on the website. Then contact me by email on education@lbka.org.uk to register your interest. I will then communicate directly with you. People who have taken the Basic in 2021 may be particularly interested in pursuing this.

Please note that a certain amount of commitment is required, both by me as tutor and the candidates. It is not something that can be decided and pursued at the last minute. Those who may be interested should contact me now.

February in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

February is a time of increasing activity for the bees.



Spotted by Geoff: Two other hives were moved within the apiary. so dead vegetation was used over the entrance to make them reorientate. Photo and caption: Geoff Hood.

Although cold and rainy on the outside, and, to all appearances all appears to be very quiet, a lot is happening inside the cluster. Brood rearing is increasing and this requires use of additional stores as the temperature in the centre of the cluster is increased from 20°C to 35°C. Bees also consume relatively few stores in Winter but when they start to fly more in late February / early March the consumption substantially increases. Therefore, the main job of the beekeeper is to keep an eye on stores. Bee colonies are more likely to die out in February or early spring due to starvation, not due to the cold. My own personal view is that, as a beekeeper, I make various mistakes but simply letting my bees die of starvation through my neglect should not be one of them.

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

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



Spotted by Eugene: 5°C and there's two bumblebees on this plant. Photo and caption: Eugene McConville.

then it is better not to feed at all so not to cause any disturbance.

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

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

Other jobs to do

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

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

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

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

Torben Schiffer's January Winter Lecture: are our “square boxes” and intervention management good for bees?

Martin reports on Torben Schiffer's January Winter Lecture “How Modern Beekeeping Enhances Nectar Competition and Contributes to Species Extinction of Wild Pollinators”, a very thought-provoking lecture that has relevance to our London Bee Situation work.

*Martin Hudson
LBKA Member*

Torben Schiffer, from the University of Würzburg gave a controversial lecture to last year's Honey Show. LBKA was honoured that he gave two lectures to us on similar subjects in January and February 2022. I am reporting here on his first lecture entitled “How Modern Beekeeping Enhances Nectar Competition and Contributes to Species Extinction of Wild Pollinators”. The evening was recorded and can be viewed by LBKA members at https://www.lbka.org.uk/winterlecture_videos.html.

The Lecture

Torben introduced this lecture by stating that the reasons why most people started beekeeping was to ‘help the bees’, but in fact, the glorified picture of beekeeping does not do this – quite the reverse, in fact. Torben started conventional beekeeping in 2006 whilst studying biology and soon realised that many of the modern ways of ‘keeping’ bees were more designed for the convenience of beekeepers, than for the bees. He started research into bees in their natural environments (tree cavities) with Professor Jürgen Tautz, and quickly became convinced that “keeping bees in square boxes was not good for the bees”. He started by explaining that population dynamics – the rates of reproduction and death have a capacity limit, affected by density dependency. If a swarm arrives in a forest, it will grow until it reaches its capacity limit – affected by housing and food availability, and the higher the number competing for these resources the higher the stress affecting them. He referred to Tom Seeley's research (in the Arnot Forest, in rural northern New York State in the US), which has identified that the ideal nest capacity is between 30 and 60 litre capacity, and away from ground level, with small entrances, and that the natural density of honey



Table of hives with volumes, Insulation qualities and climatic variations of different types of bees nests. Source: Slide from Torben Schiffer's talk.

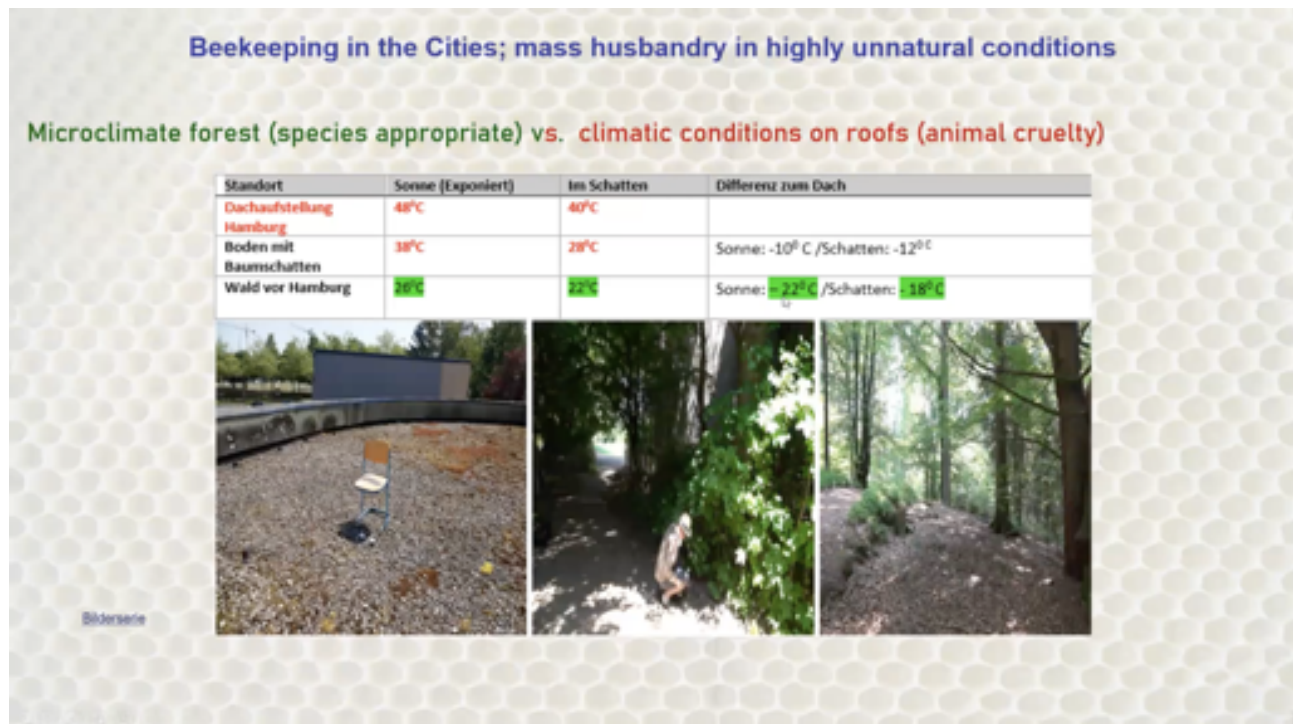
bees in this area is one colony per square kilometre. He reported that the density in Hamburg, where he works, is 17.3 colonies per sq/km, and in Berlin on average 17 colonies per sq/km, and up to 23 colonies in some locations.

Torben described Seeley's research into swarms, which established their new home away from ground level, where lower varroa counts were found. In smaller cavities, he also found a lower proportionate number of varroa mites. He suggested that natural selection results in smaller colonies. He also showed some research undertaken by Beyer, the chemicals company, which showed that colonies located in damp conditions, close to the ground and close together were more likely to perish or to suffer from spread of robbing, mould growth, disease and epidemics.

He explained that honeybees, unlike all other pollinators, are true super-generalists. They also have a range of up to 10 km, compared to most wild bees, which range only a few hundred metres. Even without being fed, honeybees will out-compete wild bees for nectar when in competition, and this has been the main reasons for his concerns about current modern beekeeping practices.

He then turned to tree cavities, as the most suitable nests for honeybees. They usually have very thick walls,

which resist lateral water flow, and have very good insulating properties. He demonstrated that water and air flows much more easily through a log from bottom to top than from side to side (“wine does not come out of a wine barrel”) – by spreading some soap at one end of a log and blowing into the bottom of the log – easily creating soap bubbles at the other end! There will be no mould in a tree cavity, because the bees propolise the walls of a tree cavity, but not the top, so that any moisture is moved out of the cavity upwards with warm air. The bees will use any water that condenses onto the propolised walls instead of having to collect it from outside. The whole of the (usually round) cavity is kept at a steady temperature and there are no cold corners, such as those in a standard ‘box’ hive. He showed a graph of temperatures around a tree cavity nest in springtime – when brood is being developed – showing widely varying changes outside the cavity and inside – where the temperature hardly changes at all. He suggested that in this situation, bees during the winter might only use 2.5 kilos of honey to maintain an even temperature, whilst in a conventional box they need some 20-25 kilos. He suggested that small colonies can get through the winter much more easily because they are not dying through ‘overwork’ in maintaining an even temperature. The same applies to maintaining



Temperatures in full sun vs shade. Source: Slide from Torben Schiffer's talk.

a stable humidity in a tree cavity, compared to a thin box.

Bees have to compensate the heat loss from thin boxes by working much harder, and dying off sooner, hence the need to over-winter larger colonies. In a well-insulated square box, the humidity can be kept stable, but the temperature still varies. In skeps, humidity and temperature are more stable. He concluded that “keeping bees in boxes is convenient for us, but at the same time wastes huge amounts of nectar resources. Honeybees aren’t voracious, it’s us!” He showed a table (see figure) giving the different volumes, Insulation qualities and climatic variations of different types of bees nests, which shows that ‘our’ normal boxes are the least efficient means of keeping bees.

He explained that a colleague had experienced the sudden import of 20 colonies by a beekeeper to the meadow behind his home in the country, which had reduced the number of wild bees visiting his garden from 500 a day to less than 15 a day. The honeybees from the colonies had taken all the nectar because of their greater need for the nectar resources.

He quoted his own experiment where he sat on the roof of a school where he teaches. Here, the temperature in the sun was 48°C and 40°C in the shade. He said “As I was standing on that roof, I was ... erm... literally... erm... evaporating!”. In a shaded tree area nearby, these temperatures were 38°C and 30°C. He then drove to a forest a few miles from the city, where these comparative temperatures were 26°C and 22°C. “In the forest I was able to breathe again – just think where we are placing the bees, and what it does to them.” Clearly colonies located in city cen-

tres (such as ours in London) are likely to have to work much harder (and die in larger numbers from exhaustion, so require much larger colonies) to maintain even temperature and humidity, he suggested.

He went on to describe honeybee overpopulation in Berlin, and showed a map highlighting the areas where wild bees still exist within the city. He reminded us of the average density of 17 colonies per square kilometre, which means that 484 honey bee colonies are foraging in every square metre of space in the city. Of the 560 species of wild bee in Germany, 38 have been lost in the last 3 decades, and there is evidence that bumble bees are dying by early June each year. Bumble bees are protected in Germany, but feeding honey bee colonies is not illegal, but this is what is killing and/or wiping out wild bees.

He went on to describe the amount of sugar that is produced per km² of ‘intensive landscape’, and suggested that the Berlin density of honeybees probably uses half the amount of sugar produced in that intensive landscape, whilst if we allowed natural selection to limit the number of colonies to 2 or 3 colonies per km², these colonies would consume not more than 1% of the sugar produced, leaving 99% for other pollinators.

Some research in Munich has determined that ‘there is a significant negative relationship between the densities of honeybees and those of flower-visiting wild bees, almost regardless of the flower type’, and much other research reflects these conclusions. He therefore suggests that “we’re saving the wrong bees”.

He introduced us to his ‘artificial tree cavity’, a false tree cavity seeking to replicate the conditions in a real tree cavity, which he has been developing for the last

decade or so. It is hung fairly high in a tree, has thick (ideally 10 cm) wooden walls, but with open (vertical) tree fibres (cork) allowing humidity and temperature to be economically regulated by the bees. He offered to send plans of these to us so that we can build some to try them out, and perhaps encourage schools to put them up in their grounds.

Finally, Torben talked about honey, which should not be sold cheaply, but should only be sold as a high class luxury product. It is not essential so should not be produced cheaply.

He runs a not-for-profit organisation which sets out a number of demands which he summarised:

- Beekeeping must be strictly regulated, on a sustainability principle;
- Feeding honeybees should be forbidden, they should live (and die) naturally;
- Beekeeping and its organisations are not for the benefit of nature, nor of the environment;
- Intensive beekeeping, including travelling with large numbers of colonies should be forbidden;
- Man-made queen rearing to adapt honeybees to our needs should be forbidden;
- Beekeeping organisations should be obliged to provide holistic education;
- Honey is a luxury product, and should be treated as such.

His final point was that Honeybees are not workers for humans. The current situation is not of their making. Honeybees play an integral but important part in our ecosystem, so long as densities and living conditions are natural.

The Discussion

Richard Glassborow welcomed Torben's lecture and thanked him for posing many thought-provoking issues to LBKA. He explained LBKA's position in its report on the London Bee Situation, and that we were introducing bees to London's children through our 'Window Into Wildlife' with 'School Food Matters'. Torben responded by pointing out that one of his tree cavity boxes allowed the activity of the bees to be observed without interfering with them, because it has a heavily insulated glass window.

The first question asked Torben how a colony would survive if we did not feed them through a winter when they had not collected enough to survive. Torben's answer was "They won't". That was the point of his emphasis earlier about natural selection. He said that it is absolutely essential that ecology is kept in balance. If we keep them alive, we are unbalancing the system, and putting at risk other pollinators and other species. He pointed out that, in some places where he has hung up a tree cavity, the bees have starved, because there was no forage in that location for them, and they should not be there.

He was asked about how any registration might work, and he pointed out that in Berlin, the University itself is

educating 1,000 beekeepers each year, and the German Beekeeping Association continues with its 'glorification of beekeeping', despite the dire situation which he described in his presentation. He reported that his views are not popular in Germany, even though his research is widely read.

Torben suggested that disease is not caused by the bees, but by modern beekeeping practices. I asked him whether we could use our contacts with schools by encouraging them to hang up the tree cavities so that the children could watch what happened. He agreed, and described his 'Refubees' project in several schools in Hamburg, where he had hung up his empty false tree cavities and - to the excitement of the children who were monitoring bees who had naturally taken up residence - they had later swarmed themselves directly into another empty tree cavity. He suggested that showing children how to take the honey out of framed boxes is not 'holistic education', but watching nature acting naturally, including the non-survival of some colonies, would be his form of 'holistic education'.

He explained that many of the forests in Germany had been cut down after the two World Wars, so the natural tree cavities - which sometime took decades or even centuries to develop - had been almost entirely wiped out. That was why he had developed his man-made tree cavity, using young fast-growing wood. He has two versions of the cavity, but his preference is for the 10 cm-walled cavity, because that has a better more natural environment for bees, as well as for other endangered species, such as bats, birds and hornets - all of which have also used them.

Torben gave a second lecture on 5th February on "Man-Made Breeding and Selection - "Why Modern Beekeeping will eventually send the species of honey bees to its demise". I will report on that next month.

Focus on Forage

Mark tells us what's in flower at this time of year. This article is reprinted from last year.

Mark Patterson
forage@lbka.org.uk

There are valuable pollen sources that are making an appearance in February.

Winter Aconites (*Eranthis hyemalis*) are beginning to appear. Their bright lemon yellow flowers are attractive to bees which will collect their pollen. They are members of the Buttercup family.

In gardens **hellebores** are also flowering, offering much needed pollen. Hellebores come in a wide variety of colours. The hybrid hellebores are particularly hardy



Willow

and easy to grow as are the native stinking hellebores (*Helleborus foetidus*) which can be found in gardens and in wild areas too.

Winter heliotrope (*Petasites fragrans*) is a relative of our native Butterbur but flowers much earlier. It's not a UK native and can be quite invasive when established in the wild but is a great garden plant for bees in late winter. The flowers are shaped like a toilet brush and pink in colour.

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

Wallflowers (*Erysimum*) are flowering now and will continue to do so right through till late spring. Bees will visit both the popular bedding type wallflowers as well as the longer-lived everlasting perennial types. Their purple and orange 'bowls' are particularly good for bees as they have a very long flowering period and will bloom almost continuously all year round.

Off the ground there are several shrubs and small trees which are now flowering and these may offer rewards of nectar on warm days alongside the pollen they produce. These include **Mahonia** or **Oregon Grape** which grows in our towns and cities in abundance and flowers throughout the winter providing nectar and pollen for bees. In southern towns and cities **Buff Tailed bumblebees** (*Bombus terrestris*) continue to be increasingly active throughout the winter, surviving largely on this



Hellebore



Viburnum tinus

plant. Around 75% of winter flowers visited by bees are Mahonia. The variety 'winters sun' is particularly attractive. Bees taking advantage of Mahonia blooms in winter have few other insects to compete with and can fare better than some colonies active in summer.

Viburnum shrubs include a number of deciduous and evergreen species which flower during the winter months. They are relatives of our native **Guelder Rose** (*Viburnum opulus*). Some of bees' most popular Viburnums include the evergreen *Viburnum tinus* whose sweetly scented cream blooms flower from November through to March, and *Viburnum bodnaatense* whose pink flowers bloom from around Christmas to March.

Several **Clematis** species are useful forage sources to



Mahonia.

bees in winter. *Clematis amandii* and *Clematis cirrhosa* both have creamy white flowers and bloom in winter. Honey and winter active bumble bees will visit them for pollen.

Winter Flowering Cherry (*Prunus subhirtella*) flowers from late November to February producing pale pink flowers. I've very rarely seen any bees on the blooms but have often seen flies on them. In the absence of better forage like Mahonia bees will visit the flowers.

Sweet Box (*Sarcococca confusa*) is a short growing evergreen shrub which produces extremely fragrant blooms (reminiscent of hyacinths) from late winter into early spring. It's one of those plants that you almost always smell long before you see it. **Winter Heather** (*Heaths Erica sp.*) produce tubular blooms in shades of white to pink throughout the winter. They are coming to the end of their flowering period now but still providing forage for bees brave enough to venture out.

Winter flowering Honeysuckle flower during winter, some of which are climbers and some are shrubs. One of the best is *Lonicera fragrantissima*.

Daphne shrubs are beginning to flower now and their intense perfume-like scent will attract bees to collect their pollen.

Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) is flowering now and the long male catkins drip with pollen. On warm days Honeybees may visit the catkins to collect pollen, though the plants are wind pollinated and do not need the bees to reproduce.

Other trees that produce catkins may start to make an appearance in February include **willows** (*Salix sp.*) and **poplars** (*Populus sp.*) though they are usually a little later flowering.

Upcoming events

Sunday 13th February: Monthly meeting: Varroa Control 2022: spoilt for choice

11:00-13:00 at Same zoom link as usual (in the Members' Area of the website and sent to your email).

This will be delivered by a guest speaker, Bob Smith from Medway Beekeepers, a former Bee Inspector and Basic assessor to the LBKA. Now with 15 VMD-Approved varroacides, plus multiple application methods, how to make good choices and stay safe!

Wednesday 16th February: Winter Lecture: Varroa-resistant Honeybees

18:30 at via Zoom (see your email for a link)

This lecture will be delivered by Professor Stephen Martin from University of Salford, and will focus on the various tolerant mechanisms identified, and how some honey bee populations in Brazil and parts of Africa, USA and UK all appear to have evolved similar ways to combat the Varroa mite.

Tuesday, 22nd February: Pub Social

18:30 onwards at Crown & Anchor, 246 Brixton Road, SW9 6AQ

The Crown & Anchor is large and never crowded, decent enough food and has an excellent selection of beers. About 10 mins from Stockwell, Brixton or Oval Tube stations.

Sunday 13th March: Monthly meeting: Swarm management

11:00-13:00 at Same zoom link as usual (in the Members' Area of the website and sent to your email).

Tips on managing swarms as a responsible urban beekeeper.

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:** Simon Saville, admin@lbka.org.uk
- **Education:** Howard Nichols education@lbka.org.uk
- **Membership:** Aidan Slingsby, services@lbka.org.uk
- **Events:** Annie McGeoch, events@lbka.org.uk
- **Apiaries:** Tristram Sutton, apiaries@lbka.org.uk
- **Mentoring:** Elliot Hodges, mentor@lbka.org.uk
- **Resources:** Will Fry, resources@lbka.org.uk
- Stuart Kennon, stuart.kennon@lbka.org.uk

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

