



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

April, 2022

We've had a spell of colder weather, but the sun has brought daytime temperatures up and colonies seem to be raring to go. Correspondingly, LBKA's activities are gearing up, and are starting to resemble normality, though we continue to take precautions against the spread of COVID-19. Our first in-person monthly meeting is on Sunday as a fantastic new venue. May this be the first of many. With one Winter Lecture to go (p3), we can now plan for the nosema microscopy session on Sunday, Bee Health Day next month and the Lambeth Country Show later on in Summer (16th & 17th July). We need more volunteers to help out – please contact Annie on events@lbka.org.uk.

LBKA won one of the Bees' Needs Champions awards! Thanks to all who helped make LBKA worthy of this and do read the application and evidence we provided on (p10 & 12). See the announcements for an Open Day and some free talks. Also, do read Martin's article about Torben's "Schiffer Tree" for hosting wild honey bee colonies (p8). Thanks all those who have helped provide content this month. 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, Martin Hudson, George Kozobolis, Annie McGough, Eugene McConville, Howard Nichols and Mark Patterson.** 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

I would like to share some good news with the whole membership since it has come about as a result of a collaborative effort by a great many volunteers, supported and encouraged by the membership as a whole. We have just heard from DEFRA that LBKA has been "selected as a winner of a 2021 Bees' Needs Champions Award, in our Local Authority and Community category".

Their letter goes on to say: "The judging panel was very impressed by the calibre of the applications, but yours stood out as being particularly impressive. You and the other winners in the category complement our winners in the farming category."

In her letter congratulating us, Rebecca Pow MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for DEFRA, wrote, "I was particularly impressed by your work to connect with the wider community, schools and councils, by promoting responsible urban beekeeping".

The application for the award was limited to 300 words plus supporting evidence. Please have a read of the



"I find Hairy footed flower bees are generally not easy to photograph because they never stay still, especially the males. But then this female stopped as if to pose for the camera. Bizarre!" Photo and caption: Richard Glassborow.

application on page 10 and the evidence we supplied on page 12 as they represent important aspects of our Association.

Announcements

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

April's in-person Monthly Meeting and Pub Social

April's Monthly Meeting will be our first in-person meeting for over two years! It will be **11:00-13:00** on Sunday (10th April) at **The Foundry** (17 Oval Way, London, SE11 5RR) where we will be using microscopy to diagnose bees for nosema.

If you'd like to check nosema in your colonies, bring 30 or so of the older freshly-killed (within 2 days of the meeting) bees that have been humanely killed in the freezer **overnight** (so they don't revive during the session). You can collect the older bees by catching them in a polythene bag as they return to the hive or (if they are not flying) take the roof off and collect the bees that come up through the crownboard hole.

The COVID-19 situation is ongoing and we will be taking precautions. Please do not come if you are feeling unwell, please wear a mask, disinfect your hands when you arrive (we will provide disinfectant) and we will expect people to keep their distance from each other when using the microscopes.

The Pub Social this month will be on **Tuesday 26th April** from 18:30 onwards at **The Fentiman Arms** (64 Fentiman Rd, London, SW8 1LA). The Fentiman Arms, described as a "homely, cushion-strewn pub with colourful art, rustic wooden tables and a walled beer garden". Near Oval, Vauxhall and Kennington tube stations. Thanks to Giovanni for the suggestion.

May's Monthly Meeting will be **Bee Health Day** at our Mudchute Apiary on **Sunday 8th May** where we will be discussing how to recognise, prevent the spread and otherwise deal with bee and brood diseases. An important topic due to London's high honeybee colony density.

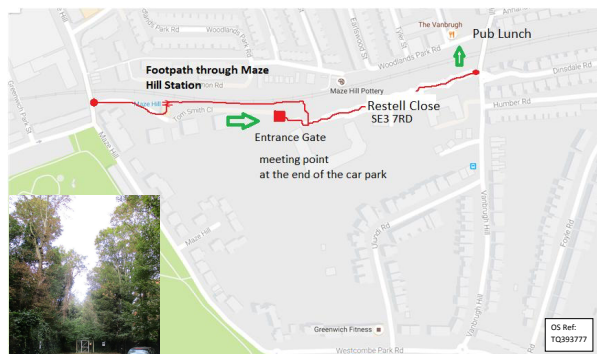
Westcombe Woodlands' Open Day

Westcombe Woodlands was one of the beneficiaries of our Pollinator Fund. Its next Open Day will be on 1st May, 14:00-16:00, so it's your chance of coming to see what it's achieving. The Pollinator Project is underway with the meadow turf laid and beginning to grow.

It is not too far from the Mudchute apiary on the Isle

WESTCOMBE WOODLANDS LOCATION MAP

Entrance Gate at the end of Restell Close private car park Postcode SE3 7RD.



How to get to Westcombe Woodlands' Open Day

of Dogs. There is a foot tunnel connection from Greenwich to the Isle of Dogs for pedestrians and cyclists or the DLR from Cutty Sark to Mudchute.

Westcombe Woodlands is situated behind the south side of Maze Hill station. It is accessible from the path on the south-east corner of the station. At the moment there is a constructor's compound in front of the gate, but we have access down the side of the compound.

Help needed: School Food Matters

Thank you to all those who have offered a day to come and help at a school. As people's arrangements for May and June change I find we need more people.

We need people to be able to volunteer one day on a weekday in term-time if you can. You would meet an experienced LBKA person at the school (Richard, Geoff, Lucie or Annie) and spend the day (9-3) looking after the observation hive, giving children a taste of honey off a stick (many sticks), answering questions about pollination and bees. It's a very rewarding day.

Please email me if you can do a day with a phone number and best time to ring and we can talk through dates and find a school near you.

Help needed: Lambeth Country Show in Brockwell Park

We also need help at Lambeth Country Show on both days – July 16th and 17th. It will be an opportunity to sell honey and meet the public and talk about pollination and bees and meet other members. It can be a two hour stint or as long as you like. Please get in touch (events@lbka.org.uk or 07973 259730) and join us at these events.

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.



Spotted by George: "A winter honey bee survivor avails of herself the early spring sunny and warm weather and is seen here flying towards the beautiful, pink and aromatic blossom of a Greek nectarine tree flower. She finally lands carefully and gets down to business collecting pollen and drinking nectar only to repeat the same cycle countless times, including her unloading journeys to her hive, until the end of the day." Photo and caption: George Kozobolis.

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.**

Winter Lectures

A reminder of the the last upcoming Winter Lectures which will be delivered over Zoom (links will be sent to members in advance). Recordings of our previous ones can be found in the [members' area](#) of the web-site.

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!

Free talks from Ulster Beekeepers

1. [So you want to be a confident beekeeper](#) (Celia Davies)
2. [Produce a good nuc and use it well](#) (Randy Oliver)
3. [Bee viruses past, present and future](#) (Prof Robert Paxton)



Spotted by George: "The high seasonal temperatures made the surviving worker bees thirsty. A close up photo of a pretty coloured honey bee seen here with her antennae checking the quality of water and her proboscis sunken deeply into the damp surface of the moss." Photo and caption: George Kozobolis.



Spotted by George: "Another one is drinking by balancing at the side of the polystyrene debris providing a beautiful mirrored image of her silhouette reflecting clearly in the calm water with the background reflected colour of the blue sky above." Photo and caption: George Kozobolis.

4. [The swarm: reproduction at colony level](#) (Prof Jamie Ellis)
5. [Queen rearing for the small producer](#) (Randy Oliver)
6. [Silent Earth](#) (Prof Dave Goulson)
7. [A year in the life of a honeybee colony](#) (Prof Jamie Ellis)



From [@londonbeekeepersassociation on Instagram](#) .“Nice to see such a #variety of #pollinators hard at work between the showers in #london #plantsforpollinators #beekeeping #beekeepers #pollination #pollinatorgarden”. Source: [our Instagram](#)



From [@londonbeekeepersassociation on Instagram](#) . “Winter flowering #honeysuckle is coming to end as dominant #nectar resource in my #garden. Hairy footed Flower bees are moving on to #Comfrey with Green Alkanet not far behind. #successionplanting is so important and our city environments can be better than rural in this respect.”. Source: [our Instagram](#)



From [@londonbeekeepersassociation on Instagram](#) . “The association #apiary team at @mudchute_farm are implementing some #chemicalfree #varroa management. This strong colony was put on new frames (called a #shook-swarm), but with one frame of open brood left as a varroa trap. Mites will only be able to reproduce inside the cells of that frame, which will be culled as soon as all its brood is sealed, thereby destroying the varroa too. This is a very effective way to deal with varroa and effect comb change at the same time, but the colony needs to be strong enough and be fed plenty of syrup.”. Source: [our Instagram](#)

LBKA Courses in 2022

We will be running our Introductory Courses this year after a two-year break. Theory sessions will be delivered via Zoom on the evenings of Tuesday 12th April, Thursday 14th April, Tuesday 19th April and Thursday 21st April. The 60 participants will be allocated to one of three practical sessions on Saturday 23rd April at our Holland Park apiary, Sunday 24th April at our Mudchute apiary and Saturday 7th May at our Holland apiary, with other LBKA apiaries as a backup. [Book at our website.](#)

BBKA Advanced and General Husbandry Training

These are 3-day courses at Stoneleigh. You can book your place on one of these courses via the [BBKA Web Shop.](#)

- **Advanced Husbandry Assessment Preparation Training.** An intensive residential course, with high tutor to student ratio, providing time and space for both tutor to student, as well as student to student interactions. Will cover both theoretical and practical aspects of the Advanced Husbandry Assessment. Participants are required to hold the



Spotted by Eugene. "Pollinators were busy today in between the showers.". Photo and caption: Eugene McConville.

BBKA General Husbandry Certificate and to be eligible to take the Advanced Husbandry assessment in the near future. The course is will be run from **15th July to 17th July** , costs **£350** (including accommodation and meals), and has a maximum of 12 participants.

- **General Husbandry Assessment Preparation Training.** A programme of 20 hours over three days which covers both theoretical and practical aspects of the General Husbandry Assessment, aiming to give the participants an understanding of what the assessment entails and what they need to do to be successful. Participants are required to hold the BBKA Basic Certificate and to be el-



Spotted by Eugene. "Bees busy at Kew today.". Photo and caption: Eugene McConville.

igible to take the General Husbandry Assessment in 2023. The theory sessions will be held on 30th April 2022 and 1st May 2022, with the practical on 22nd May, costs £150.00 (participants bring their own lunch), and has a maximum of 12 participants.

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](#).

Old announcements from February

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

Exciting opportunity at Battersea Park Children's Zoo. If you're interested in volunteering to help set up the apiary and then manage it, please contact Simon Saville at admin@lbka.org.uk.



Old announcements from January

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.

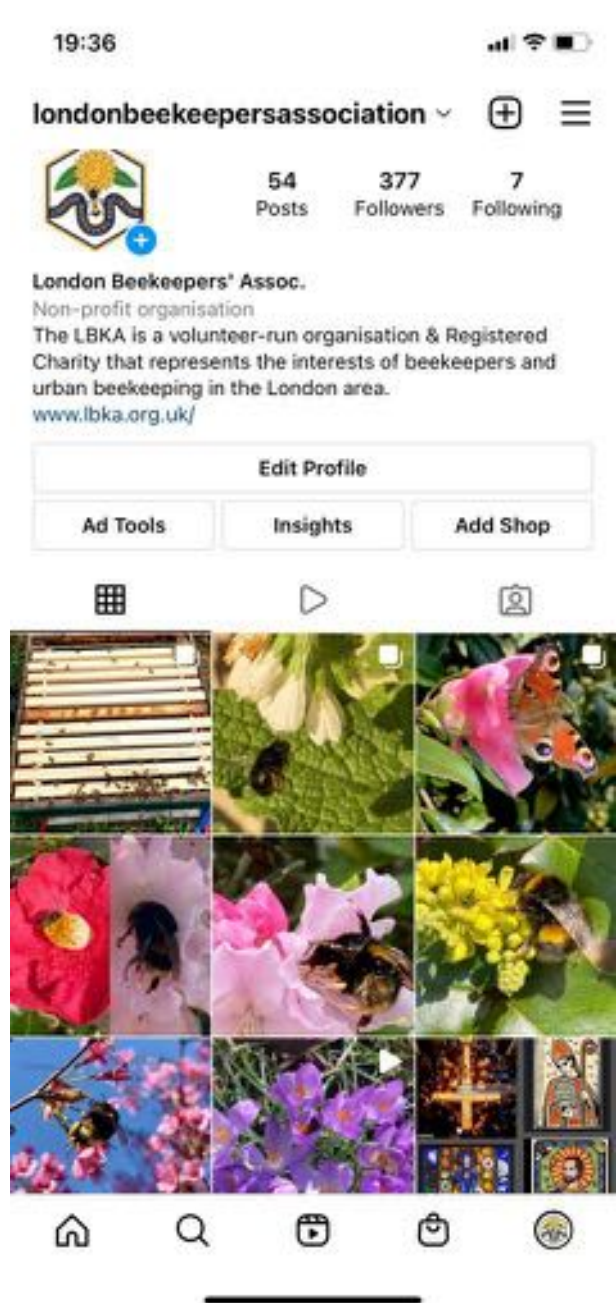
April's Committee meeting

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

We discussed the increasing number of upcoming events.

In-person events. More of our events will be moving



Update from Lucie about [@londonbeekeepersassociation](https://www.instagram.com/londonbeekeepersassociation) on Instagram. Some gorgeous photo contributions by members this month and a more technical post on shook swarming drew some interest. Followers up another 3.5% on last month continuing to creep up as is account engagement.

back to in-person, but we will continue to take precautions to help curb the spread of COVID-19.

Courses. We are all set for the beekeeping courses which start next week. We had a few volunteers, but most of the speakers are from the committee.

School Food Matters. These visits are in hand, with a team covering the Northern schools and a team covering the Southern Schools. More volunteers would be welcome.

Battersea Park Children's Zoo. Annie has agreed to mentor the volunteer group. The equipment comes

from South Park (thanks to Stuart for making this happen). There are a few other things than need to be organised, but progress is good.

Lambeth Country Show. We plan to be there and will be applying for two 3×3m plots so that we can show bees and do candle rolling.

Sunday's meeting venue. Member Andreea has helped us secure The Foundry in Vauxhall as a Monthly Meeting venue. We will have this month's nosema microscopy meeting there and will announce this to members, including how to collect bees and COVID-19 protocols.

April in the Apiary

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

Howard Nichols
education@lbka.org.uk

It is in April is that colony populations substantially increase and drones start to appear. The swarming season may also arrive in April (I already have drones in one of my five colonies) and so I have now started my weekly inspections.

The most important job for the beekeeper in April, given the usual variable weather, is still to ensure that the colony is not starving. The stores in my own hives are still falling as most of the forage being brought in seems to be pollen. More and more bees are now being born, all of which require feeding. Colonies should normally be self-sufficient by the end of April but assuming the weather holds good. It is important to check stores. Those of us who ensured that our hive(s) had at least 35lb of stores last Autumn should not have a food shortage issue in the Spring. Those colonies with stores less than 35lb last Autumn could now be running short.

Other action to be taken this month normally include the following:

Mouseguards. Remove mouseguards and replace with a clean, sterilised entrance block if not already done in March.

Mark the queen If the queen is unmarked then this is an ideal time to find and mark her. The colony is now going to continue to expand in numbers up until July whereupon it will start to contract. Swarm control will be considerably easier with a marked queen.

Colony build up. Is the colony continuing to build up? A significant benefit of keeping colony records is that the number of frames of brood is recorded.

First full inspection. Because of the prolonged and

unusual warm spell in mid March most of us have probably already made our first colony inspections. If not done in March then the first full inspection and spring cleaning of the hive should be carried out. The best way to spring clean is to have a spare broodbox and floor and simply transfer all frames and bees into a new brood box then place this on the new floor. The old box and floor can then be taken away for cleaning. From then on regular weekly inspections should be made.

Inspection

When inspecting a colony, five questions should always be asked and actions taken if appropriate.

- Is the queen present and laying?
 You do not need to find the queen. If there are eggs and these are only 1 egg per cell, or newly hatched larvae, then this is evidence that she was in the hive and laying 3 or 4 days ago.
- Has the colony enough room?
 This is a 2-part question, being enough room for the queen to continue to lay eggs and enough room for the colony to store nectar. If not then provide room by adding a super.
- Are there any queen cells?
 Queen cups are to be expected and should normally be ignored unless containing an egg or a larva. Queen cells require swarm control action by the beekeeper. If the bees have sufficient space then swarm control should not normally be an issue until late April or early May. If there is insufficient space in the hive, leading to congestion and inhibition of the circulation of queen substance, then swarming can be an April problem. Therefore, ensure that the colony has sufficient space. Add a super if necessary.
- Are there signs of disease?
 This is a comprehensive question but the strategy is always best approached by being familiar with healthy brood. Anything that does not fit this description is, prima facie, suspicious. Healthy unsealed brood is pearly white in colour, evenly laid, segmented and lies in a C-shape in the cell. Healthy sealed brood is light brown in colour, evenly laid and with slightly raised dome cappings.
- Are there enough stores until the next inspection?
 The equivalent of 2 full National brood frames is regarded as more than sufficient at this time of year, even if there is a serious and prolonged downward turn in the weather. Nectar does not usually rise in UK indigenous plants until the temperature reaches 18C. So, beware of low stores.

We have passed the Equinox and Spring is now underway. The beekeeping season is with us for the next 6 months. I hope everyone enjoys themselves during the period. It can be challenging at times but extremely rewarding. Please do come along to our monthly meetings to share your experiences and get help or suggestions with any of your queries. These are now recommencing after 2 years of Covid interruption. I hope your

bees prosper and produce lots of honey for you. Happy Beekeeping for 2022!

The “Schiffer Tree”: a viable alternative to the movable frame hive in London?

Torben Schiffer gave two Winter Lectures to LBKA earlier this year. He has promoted an artificial tree cavity to create what he believes to be as close as possible to a natural nest site for honey bees. This article reviews Torben’s research, looks at his ‘Tree’, and assesses its viability in London

Martin Hudson
LBKA Member

The Background

Torben Schiffer is a honey bee researcher in Hamburg and, having started beekeeping with his grandfather 15 years ago, has become increasingly concerned that the ‘conventional/modern’ ways of managing honey bee colonies (“beekeeping”) is not good for the species, nor for other pollinators. He gave LBKA two fascinating and controversial lectures on this subject in January and February which I reported on in the February and March Newsletters.

During his lectures, he described his research into the ideal nest site for honey bees, and suggested that honey bees ideally live in cavities over 5 metres above ground in large old trees. These cavities provide greater climatic stability, and their height is away from the usually humid microclimate (of mould, bacteria, etc) at ground level. Putting bees in thin mesh-floored boxes that most of us use to practice our hobby at ground level makes them seriously susceptible to these life-threatening conditions – what he describes as a ‘serious selection factor’. In his first lecture, his startling graphs showed remarkably less variation in both temperature and humidity in a tree cavity than in a conventional hive, with its cold corners and open mesh floor. He suggested that these conditions put much less stress on the colony, significantly extending the lives of the winter workers, and resulting in them only requiring 2 or 3 kilos of stores to see them through the winter than the 20+ kilos required by a colony in a wooden box.

He also describes in his article [“The True Price of Honey”](#) that honey bees are having to consume vastly greater amounts of nectar simply to manage the greater



“Wall thickness of a natural tree cavity (left) compared with a standard hive. Not only do the thick walls influence the indoor climate, but also the diameter. In a tree hollow, the heat is concentrated in a small space and is well insulated by solid walls, while in hives it is largely lost via the large, thin surfaces.” Quote and photo: Torben Schiffer.

variations in temperature and humidity in hives than they need to consume when living in a tree cavity.

Torben also demonstrated the properties of a tree cavity to provide the best environment for bees to occupy by placing some washing liquid at one end of a log, and creating bubbles from this soap by blowing ‘up’ the log from the other end. Bubbles appeared almost instantaneously. This demonstration showed that wood literally consists of thousands of microfibrils, comparable to a bunch of straws. These fibres are able to absorb and emit water (based on the outer conditions). Wood combines three very important features in only one material: heat and water capacities, and insulation. If the weather is too humid, wood absorbs humidity, if it gets drier, wood emits humidity – the same with heat. Heat capacity is further enhanced by the use of propolis by bees to line the walls. As a result, the climatic conditions are rock stable. Thin-walled boxes do not show these effects because of their lack of mass. He stated that he has never seen mould growth in a bee colony in a tree cavity.

He also said that ambient temperatures in urban city environments are some 14°C higher than in a shaded forest area, so that honey bees on city roofs are having to ‘manage’ this increase in heat on top of everything else. This, added to our own knowledge (in the ‘London Bee Situation’ report) about the overpopulation of managed honey bee colonies particularly in Inner London, should alert us to considering changes in our own beekeeping behaviour.

In his second lecture, he pointed out that combs in tree cavities are only built in the top third to a half of the space in a tree cavity. He described a ‘3D defence web’ of bees which usually occupies the space above the floor of the cavity, but below the combs, an effective guard against predators reaching the brood or the stores above this ‘web’. The detritus on the floor of the cavity, usually well below the entrance, consists of wax moths, larvae, varroa mites and book scorpions.

Any attempts by these creatures to gain access to the brood and stores in the upper part of the cavity, as well as predators or robber bees getting into the cavity through the entrance, are effectively repelled by this '3D web' and by single workers chasing the wax moths down 24/7. For example, Torben, as well as Tom Seeley, have not seen cases of AFB or EFB in a tree cavity. In a square box hive, there is no room for this 'defence web' to operate, so these predators can more easily gain access to the colony – another 'selectional factor'.

Torben's conclusions, as described in my earlier articles and in his two lectures, is that the development of the movable frame hive in the last 100-150 years, together with attempting to 'breed out' unwelcome traits, has been purely for the benefit of beekeepers (eg honey producers). Far from 'saving the bees', beekeepers have been encouraging honey bees to evolve over the last century to become so reliant upon human intervention that they are less likely to survive in their natural forest environment.

The Schiffer Tree

His extensive research, including work with the renowned bee researchers Prof Jürgen Tautz in Würzburg and Prof Tom Seeley in the US, has led Torben to create his 'Schiffer Tree', an artificial tree cavity constructed of wood (usually cork and pine) and stainless steel roof, base, clamps and tensioners, mirroring as closely as possible the characteristics of a natural tree cavity. He now runs a not-for-profit organisation which promotes this structure, made by several companies in Germany, and it is being trialled in several locations both in cities and in forests nearby, as well as a school in Hamburg where he teaches, to enable honey bees to live in the wild without human intervention. This allows bees to regain their natural lives. It literally brings back natural selection and adaptation. Evolution is no longer frozen by human interventions such as feeding, treating or breeding for human desires. There is another version of the 'Tree' called the 'science version', which incorporates one or more windows (coloured red, which is not visible to bees), so that the activities inside can be viewed without disturbing them.

Torben has sent David Hankins, LBKA Treasurer who arranged his lectures, copies of the detailed plans of the Schiffer Tree, together with a couple of flyers (in German) produced by one of the German companies now producing them – Tree Cave. We have promised Torben that the plans will not be publicly circulated on the internet, but only used by any LBKA member who may be able to reproduce the Schiffer Tree in the UK, so that it can be tried out, perhaps as part of our School Food Matters school visits. It would also be most helpful if any interested German-speaking LBKA member could translate these documents into English, so that they can be used by any interested LBKA member. David would welcome any offers at treasurer@lbka.co.uk.



Its Construction

Torben tells me that his preferred thickness of the (usually pine) walls around his Tree is 10cm, to maintain minimal changes in temperature and humidity and to replicate as closely as possible the natural environment of tree cavities in the wild, but that a Tree made with this thickness weighs over 90kg. Tree Cave have compromised on this thickness and their plans now show walls which are 63cm thick. These are nearer to 50kg in weight.

The Tree consists of 12 woodworked interleaved pine pieces which dovetail into a tube, plugged at top and bottom with cork (to replicate the features of a natural



tree, with the absorbent fibres in the centre and the much better insulated outer layers of the trunk). The tube is held together with five stainless steel clamps, and the base and roof are held together with three tension ropes, tightened with wing nuts. The total height of the structure is 1.3m (over 4'3").

In his discussions with me since his Winter Lectures, he has described later adjustment to the design, for example to enlarge the entrance hole in his 'Tree' to 60 mm, so that green woodpeckers can gain access to the cavity without disturbing the bees in their cluster. With the original smaller size (40 mm), woodpeckers would repeatedly be attacked by bees from the cluster whilst it was trying to enlarge the entrance, who were then unable to return, resulting in gradual depletion of the colony after repeated attempts. Now, woodpeckers can get straight in, but will then either be chased away by bees still inside the (warmer) cavity, or could be killed by just one or two stings from bees!

A video on the internet "[SchifferTree – Bücherskorpion \(Chelifer cancroides\) kaufen](#)", shows one of Torben's 'Trees' being constructed from these pre shaped wood sections. I had not realised how massive the construction is! It is interesting that several on-line videos show the structure standing on the ground – I'm not surprised! "This is a selectional factor – bees do not belong on the ground."

These pictures above show a row of them, and detail of the joints between the 'slats', clamped together – probably with the thinner (6.3 cm) wall.

It would be fascinating to obtain samples of the 'Schiffer Tree' to trial in London, to see how differently a



Der Schiffer Tree - angepasste Bienenhaltung
Ingenieuren

Die Eisdrehreifen, die den SchifferTree zusammenhalten, werden in Handarbeit gefertigt und angepasst. Die Korkunterlage verhindert Holzkorrosion und gleicht die Expansion & Kontraktion des Schiffer Trees aus, welche durch unterschiedliche Holzfeuchtewerte entstehen.

„Investition in Ihre Zukunft“

Dieses Projekt wurde von der Europäischen Union aus dem Europäischen Fonds für regionale Entwicklung und vom Freistaat Bayern kofinanziert.

colony occupying one of them behaves. However, the metalwork, including the tensioning wires, as well as the timber machining that would be required, is consider-

Bees' Needs Award 2021

Application Form

Name of park / green space: Greater London

Managing Organisation: London Beekeepers' Association

Please describe your project (max 300 words)

Responsible Beekeeping within Sustainable Biodiverse Ecosystems in London

Over the course of recent years the character and direction of the London Beekeepers' Association (LBKA) has been strongly influenced by our awareness of issues, and consequences arising, from the relentless and ongoing increase in the number of honey bee colonies in some parts of London.

In 2019 we completed our report, *The London Bee Situation*, and have since been gradually sharing the findings and discussing the implications with, firstly, our own members and then our neighbouring BKAs and other parties.

We believe the colony density in some parts of London constitutes issues of:

- animal welfare for the honey bees themselves – forage availability, stress and disease transmission;
- nature conservation and a threat to biodiversity – competition for limited floral resources and a vector of diseases
- friction in the social context – principally, swarms, feral colonies in inappropriate places, and, in some cases, disruption caused by poor temperament.

Offset against this, there are many positive outcomes from beekeeping – providing opportunities for first-hand public engagement with a semi-wild animal, leading to greater awareness, interest and respect for the natural world; personal well-being; pollination of urban food production; excellent honey, etc.

On top of the traditional roles of a beekeeping association – promoting the interests of beekeeping; educating beekeepers – the LBKA is undertaking additional activities specifically addressing the issues outlined above, namely:

- Communicating evidence based information to redress the illinformed or misinformed narratives that are driving the increase in honey bee numbers in London. The initial objective being to halt further increase.
- Promote Responsible Urban Beekeeping, sustainable within biodiverse ecosystems
- Raise public awareness of the natural world through first hand engagement with honey bees
- Improve the London environment for bees – all bees and other pollinators – and Londoners

Our application for the Bees' Needs Champions Award.

able, so it would probably only be viable if we could get sufficient interest from LBKA members (or other beekeepers?) in changing their habits of a lifetime, and allow the bees to “do their own thing” in large numbers. Does any LBKA member have access to, and might be interested in utilising, a multi-axis timber-cutting machine which could machine the timber parts, and/or the metalwork skills to produce or obtain the various stainless steel components that would be required?

It has been suggested to me that a (probably much cheaper) alternative would be to locate a few real tree cavities, say in older trees in the parks or gardens of London, and bait them to encourage swarms to take up occupation. Maybe that is another project worth exploring.

What is being achieved by your project? (max 250 words)

The LBKA is trying to address the negative and enhance the positive aspects of urban beekeeping in London.

Communication:

- We are promoting our report, [The London Bee Situation](#), and talking to the [press](#) to redress the misinformed narratives that are driving the number of honey bee colonies still higher.
- Professor Phil Stevenson, Kew Science, drew on our report for his own research. His paper, [State of the World's Urban Ecosystems](#), showed beekeeping in some parts of London to be unsustainable.
- We are making these papers and other supporting evidence available on our [website](#) and social media
- We have advised the London Boroughs of Lewisham, Lambeth, Kensington and Chelsea (whose Bee Superhighway project we support and helped launch); we are supporting Pollinating London Together
- We have delivered a number of talks to the public as well as presentations to corporations wanting to 'help' bees.

"Bees and Flowers go together" initiative:

- We advise about 20 to 30 corporate enquiries a month that the best way to help bees is to plant flowers
- We have piloted a Pollinator Grant to help community groups improve forage and habitat for all pollinators in London

Schools Programme with our partner charity, School Food Matters, funded by the Wholefood Foundation:

- We visit schools, presenting bees as a 'Window onto Wildlife'. During lockdown we used interactive Zoom sessions; by July 2021 we were back to taking live bees into schools and hosting school children in one of our teaching apiaries. In 2020-21 alone, we estimate we have reached approximately 4,000 London families by inspiring their children with awe and wonder, interest and respect for all bees.

Photographs in support of your application can also be included.

Please return to greenflagawards@keepbritaintidy.org on or before **22nd October 2021**

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

As we enter April many of our true heralds of spring have begun to flower. Among them the pretty pink **Cuckoo Flower** *Cardamine pratensis*. This dainty little pink flower is a true sign that spring 'proper' has arrived. It's an important nectar plant for many pollinators and the main food plant for the larva of the **Orange Tip Butterfly** – a species sadly in decline.

Deadnettle, Dandelions, Coltsfoot, Primulas, Wood Anemones, Green Alkanet, Comfrey and Lungwort are at last now coming in bloom 2-3 weeks later than last year. The latter 2 in particular are popular with the **Hairy Footed Flower Bee**. Another flower I'm noticing lots of **small solitary bees** on at the moment, is **Lesser Celendine**. This plant is unusual in the buttercup family (*Ranunculaceae*) as it is one of the few buttercups that is attractive to bees. Most other *Ranunculus* have nectar which contains the toxin protoanemonin which bees cannot digest and can

LBKA Evidence in support of submission for Bees' Needs Award 2021

BETTER BEEKEEPING



To ensure our honey bees continued to be well managed during Covid-19 pandemic restrictions London Beekeepers adapted to public health protocols such as social distancing.

Registered charity no. 1165736

THE LONDON BEE SITUATION

London Beekeepers' Association

London Bee Situation

LBKA has been aware for some time that the continuing rise in beekeeping in London might be creating some issues of social inconvenience, animal welfare (for the honey bees) and nature conservation, albeit unintended.

In 2020, LBKA produced an internal report called the London Bee Situation, which gathered together existing data to give an evidence-based overview. Our members agreed in 2021 that we should make the Report publicly available. Some of the available data is far from perfect but the fundamental picture will not be changed, even by substantial changes in data. In short, what there are undoubtedly benefits from urban beekeeping we believe there are issues that need to be addressed now.

Further, a scientific paper, *State of the World's Urban Beekeeping*, by Professor Phil Stevenson (King Science, 2020), includes a section on urban beekeeping partly based on our own report. Professor Stevenson uses different and more up to date sources of forage data and his conclusions show London (at least in parts) to be a global example of unsustainable urban beekeeping.

An article published in the Guardian *"Honey bees are voracious"* (24 July 2021) throws further light on the situation.

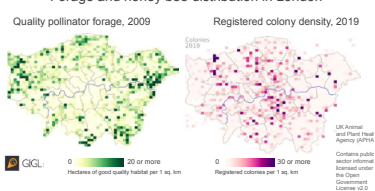
Dave Coulson, in his book *"Gardening for Bumblebees"* (2021) says (p85): "There is plentiful evidence that honey bees can compete with our wild pollinators, taking much of the available pollen and nectar, particularly when large numbers of hives are kept"

[Website link](#)

Bees and the London Environment

Forage and honey bee distribution in London

Quality pollinator forage, 2009 Registered colony density, 2019



LBKA data maps comparing distribution of registered honey bee colonies and available forage

Stevenson et al (2020)
Forage (green space) and honey bee colony distribution in London showing the available greenspace within 1 km grids for each colony. London's greenspace is derived from June 2018 Landsat imagery and the bee colony density for 2018 from colonies registered on Beebase APHA (2020). Using figures from Allen and Ratnieks (2016), we estimated 13.28 hectares (0.13 km²) of London greenspace is required per colony or 7.5 colonies per km²

"Bees and Flowers go together"

LBKA website – plants for bees

The London Beekeepers' Association

Flowers by month


By Mark Patterson BSc

Here is a list of some of Mark's recommendations, but there are many other plants that pollinators like too. You might also like to consult the [Bee-friendly plants](#).

The plants suggested here are recommended for garden planting only and are not suitable for planting in wild places such as nature reserves. To do so could be a breach of the Law. For wild areas consult our list of recommended seed suppliers for a supplier specialising in native only plants and seeds.

Hover over the photographs for details.

January (hover over the photos for details)



[Website link](#)

LBKA Leaflets

<http://www.lbka.org.uk/leaflets.html>



Wild Flower Seeds

Bees and flowers go together

Help London's bees and other pollinators by planting flowers.

Some pollinators struggle to survive in many areas of London because of a shortage of suitable flowers. This resource includes seed lists and lists of flower-friendly plants that provide pollen and nectar essential for the many types of bees, bumblebees and butterflies.

LBKA Pollinator Grant (Pilot)

Eden Community Garden, Clapham SW4

before





After implementing LBKA Pollinator grant





<http://www.lbka.org.uk/forage.html>

Schools Programme 2020 - 2021

Pollination can be seen at work right on our own doorstep. It is a perfect example of how ecosystems work.

70% of the world's population live in urban environments. Maintaining connection with the natural world essential if we are to avoid destroying it. Bees are small but mighty ambassadors for the natural world.



Evidence that accompanied our application for the Bees' Needs Champions Award.



Flowering currant.



Marsh marigold.

lead to poisoning. Lesser Celandine, however, is popular with many of our early solitary bees and occasionally Honey bees. Many of the **Micro Andrena** solitary bees feed on the golden yellow flowers which form vast carpets among cemetery, churchyards and beneath



Pulmonaria.



Celandine.

hedgerows. Another member of the buttercup family which bees may visit at this time of year is the **Marsh Marigold**.

Most of the **tulips**, **crocus** and **Winter Aconite** have now long gone over but there are still **Daffodils** in flower (though they are of little use to our bees), **alliums**, **wild garlic** and **Muscari** (Grape Hyacinth) in bloom.

This time last year, across much of southern England, **bluebells** were making an appearance. They are later this year and so far I've only seen signs of the fresh green leaves, but no flowers yet. In another few weeks, they should be out putting on a gorgeous display of blue. Blue bells may be visited by Honey bees and can produce a honey crop but they are also popular with some of the longer tongued solitary bees. Most Bluebells in London will be the invasive Spanish bluebell, but a few locations still hold stands of the native species.

During the last few days **Flowering Currant** have started to bloom. This plant is a reliable indicator that spring proper has arrived and for me a timely reminder to undertake first proper inspections. I'm writing this 24 hours after doing full inspections on several colonies where I have had to add supers because the brood bodies are full of sealed brood and honey. If a flow starts



Muscari.



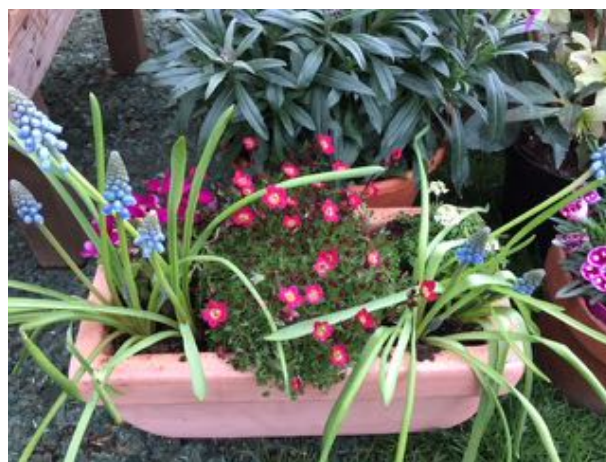
Tulips.

now and the colony runs out of room they could begin swarm preparations.

Other important sources of forage this month are the willows. The catkins of willow bear copious amounts of



Peach blossom in Fulham palace walled garden.



The pollinator friendly window box we took to Ascot a few years ago.

sulphur-yellow pollen. If your honey bees are returning to the hive dusted in yellow they will most likely have been visiting willow. It's not just honey bees that visit willow. Many bumblebees and *Andrena* bees will also collect willow pollen, and seem to time their emergence with Willow catkins. Unlike the earlier flowering catkins of **Alder** and **Hazel** willow will also produce nectar. Other trees coming into bloom right now include **Field Maple**, **Sycamore**, **Poplar** and **Ash**. April is when we normally expect to see **Cherry Laurel** blooming in abundance but across much of the country this ever-green shrub is delayed flowering due to the recent cold. On the 4th April I saw the first inflorescence about to burst into flower. Many of the small solitary *Andrena* bees rely on this shrub for pollen and nectar.

As we progress through April we should expect to see the first **Horse Chestnut** blossom. Chestnut produces very distinctive dark brick red pollen which honey bees will collect with enthusiasm. Chestnuts are one of the best examples of how plants communicate with their pollinators; the individual blooms of the flower stalk change colour as they are fertilised to inform the bees that they need not bother to visit that particular bloom. Other trees coming into bloom will include Cherry, Plum and Apple. Currently the Blackthorn is

putting on a good show of blooms and on warm days the bees may bring in a crop from this nectar source. At one of my apiaries my bees have access to about 45 hectares of mostly **Blackthorn** scrub and they bring back copious amounts of the brown coloured pollen and can fill a super with honey in little over a week.

One of the larger gardens where I keep my Honey Bees includes a 34 tree fruit orchard. So far the **nectarines**, **peaches** and **Mirabel DeNancy plum** are the only trees to have flowered. The **pears** should begin to bloom shortly followed by the **apples**, **Victoria Plum** and **Greengage**. Worryingly the half dozen Crab Apples planted around the edge of the garden to cross pollinate our cultivated apples have already bloomed which begs the question what will our apples pollinate with this year? The varieties planted were supposed to flower in unison providing cross pollination and better fruit set with the heritage apple varieties which unlike many modern cultivars do not self-pollinate.

On the outer edges of the city **Oil Seed Rape** will be starting to come into bloom and will flower well into mid-May. Beekeepers either love it or hate it for it can produce an abundance of honey but the grainy texture and trend to crystallise rock hard in the comb are drawbacks. Our member Geoffrey Hood produced a lot of Rape honey in 2015 and when I find time I intend to use it as seed honey to try and make Creamed Honey. If I'm successful you can expect a write up about that.

Jobs to do in the garden

From now on, weeding will become a regular chore in the garden. For the past 3 weeks I have been meticulously pulling out the seedlings of **Germander Speedwell**, the first shoots of **Bindweed** and **Common Cleavers** which every year threaten to take over my garden. Keeping them in check requires constant attention. Weeding is a garden chore I like the least – if only it could all be about planting flowers!

Prune back damaged branches on shrubs and fruit trees. Storm Katie has battered quite a few trees on my allotment which will now need pruning. Remove dead or damaged tissues cutting to the branch bark ridge.

Plant out summer flowering bulbs once threat of frost has gone.

Upcoming events

See our [website](#) for an up-to-date version

Sunday 10th April: Monthly meeting: Nosema and microscopy

11:00-13:00 at *The Foundry, 17 Oval Way, London SE11 5RR.*

Our first in-person meeting for over two years! We will be using microscopy to diagnose bees for nosema.

If you'd like to check nosema in your colonies, bring 30 or so of the older freshly-killed (within 2 days of the meeting) bees that have been humanely killed in the freezer *overnight* (so they don't revive during the session!). You can collect the older bees by catching them in a polythene bag as they return to the hive or (if they are not flying) take the roof off and collect the bees that come up through the crownboard hole.

The COVID-19 situation is ongoing and we will be taking precautions. Please do not come if you are feeling unwell, please wear a mask, disinfect your hands when you arrive (we will provide disinfectant) and we will expect people to keep their distance from each other when using the microscopes.

Wednesday 20th April: Winter Lecture: Simple Queen Rearing

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

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!

Tuesday, 26th April: Pub Social

18:30 onwards at *The Fentiman Arms, 64 Fentiman Rd, London SW8 1LA*

Our pub social will be at the Fentiman Arms, described as a "homely, cushion-strewn pub with colourful art, rustic wooden tables and a walled beer garden". Near Oval, Vauxhall and Kennington tube stations.

Sunday, 8th May: Monthly Meeting: Bee Health Day

11:00-13:30 at *Mudchute Park and Farm (Pier St, London, E14 3HP)*

Our annual Bee Health day is important for raising awareness of bee and bee brood diseases, especially important topic due to London's high honeybee colony density. We will be discussing how to recognise and help prevent the spread of bee and brood diseases. It will be at our Mudchute Apiary.

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.

