



The London Beekeepers' Association

LBKA News

April, 2024

The beekeeping season has well and truly started, with the first swarms starting to appear. Celebrate by coming to this Month's Monthly Meeting which will be in a pub!

In the newsletter this month, see Howard's advice what to do in the apiary at this time of year (p4) and Mark's excellent series about forage (p5).

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Thank you to this month's contributors: Howard Nichols, Annie McGeoch, Mark Patterson and Mary Walsh. Would you like to join these esteemed contributors? If so, contact me.

Please help make the newsletter better by providing content – photos, articles, reflections, advice, recipes...

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

Announcements

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

March's Monthly Meeting and Pub Social

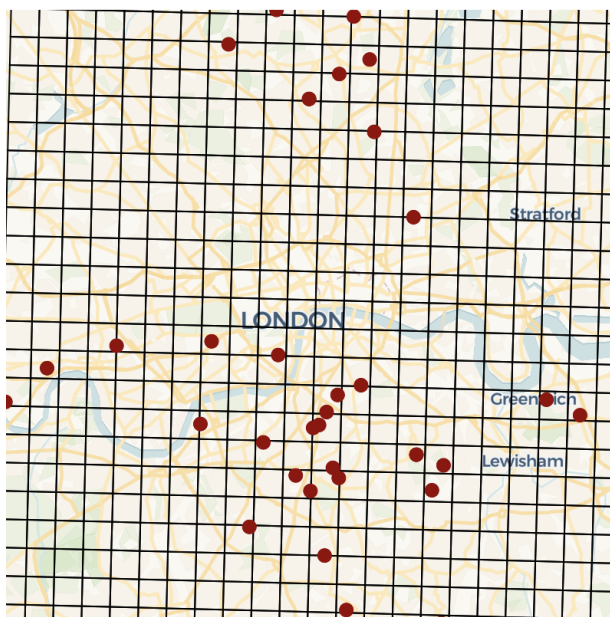
The weather forecast isn't great for Sunday's meeting and will probably not be suitable for looking at bees or doing shook swarms as we'd planned. So **April's Monthly Meeting** will be in a pub – upstairs in **The Sun** (47 Old Town, Clapham, SW4 0JL) at **11:00** – where we had our AGM. We will talk about bee inspections at this time of year, the Asian Hornet, and may have traps and Trappit for sale (bring a bottle just in case). Some of us will stay for lunch afterwards.

The **Pub Social** will be at **Market House** (443 Coldharbour Lane, London, SW9 8LN) 30th April.

May's Monthly Meeting will be our annual Bee Health Day. Venue to be confirmed.



Hornet mimic hoverfly on Cherry Blossom. Source: Aidan Slingsby.



LBKA members that are Asian Hornet Verifiers, on a 1km² grid.

Instagram

Thanks to Lucie who recently “retired” from looking after our [Instagram account](#). Yohanna, Rebecca, Annie and Aidan have been discussing how we get more members involved. The aim is to put up great images and give insightful beekeeping context about them.

We would love members to get involved in suggesting content and will be setting up a Whatsapp group (details via email).

We would simply like members to **post suggestions for nice images and captions**. Please ensure that anything you post is **suitable for sharing on social media** (all permissions secured), but we’d ideally like original content; i.e. pictures you’ve taken.

Categories of post might include:

- Nice pictures of flowers and pollinators.
- Bee behaviour (washboarding/swarming)
- Apiaries and beekeeping
- Things that are in the news.
- Things that align to LBKA values
- Things that promote LBKA.

Please post your Insta handle with your submission if you have one. We may not use all the content suggested and may edit comments. We look forward to seeing your submissions!

Asian Hornet Verifiers

This is the time of year when we’re putting out traps for Asian Hornet queens. If you’d like to be an Asian Hornet Verifier, let us know. See the map of our current Asian Hornet Verifiers. You will shortly get an email if you are registered as an Asian Hornet Verifier.

Swarm list

Now it’s swarming season we need to make sure our lists are up to date.

Swarm list: Experienced beekeepers with the inclination and means to be “on call” and have the public contact them directly can have their phone number on the [public swarm map](#). You will shortly get an email if you are.

Swarm Whatsapp: We use a Whatsapp group internally to coordinate swarm collection. Any member can join. It’s also a good place to get swarms if you’re willing to take them at short notice and you’re experienced enough to deal with bees of unknown provenance. We do not recommend beginners to start with swarms.

Introduction to Beekeeping

We are taking bookings for our flagship **Introduction to Beekeeping** course at <https://www.lbka.org.uk/courses.html>. Please spread the word! Please also contact us if you’d like to help with the course.

2024 BBKA Basic Assessment

If you keep bees, we encourage you to take the BBKA basic assessment. You need to have kept bees for a minimum period of 1 year and be a BBKA member. It 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. There is no need to pay the BBKA entry fee at this stage.

If you’re interested please email to education@lbka.org.uk. Even if you have been keeping bees for several years but not previously taken the assessment then please do seriously consider taking it in 2024. It is well worth the effort. We will 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.

Volunteers needed for Asian Hornet Roadshow

Annie and Sharon are doing fantastic work setting up stalls and talking to the public about the Asian Hornet. There are four more dates:

- Sunday 31st March, Herne Hill Market
- Sunday 12th May, Dulwich Park Fair
- Sunday 19th May, Goose Green Fair
- Sunday 26th May, Herne Hill market

Your help at these events would be much appreciated - please contact Annie on events@lbka.org.uk.

See “members’ area” for members’ goodies

LBKA members can log in via the members’ area on the website and see videos of past talks and meetings

LBKA Asian Hornet Roadshow. Annie reported back on her LBKA Asian Hornet Roadshow, the first of many.

Old announcements from February

Luke Whyatt has just become a BBKA Trustee. Luke Whyatt has been elected to BBKA as a Trustee. Amongst his many duties, he is to Chair the Asian Hornet Committee and also he will be the BBKA London representative.

Spare hives. Someone in Kilburn is no longer able to look after his hives and is looking for someone to donate them to. If you’re interested, please contact Simon on admin@lbka.org.uk.

Old announcements from January

Beekeeping opportunity. St Patrick’s Church, Wapping is seeking a lead person of BBKA Basic competence, or higher, for its 3-hive apiary located in the adjacent yard/garden, to succeed the current lead, hoping to retire before the commencement of the 2024 season. If interested, for details please contact Len Mole on 07715564569.

Old announcements from November/December

New trustees. The Trustees and committee comprise Richard Glassborow (Chair), Simon Saville (Secretary), David Hankins (Treasurer), Aidan Slingsby (Membership), Howard Nichols (Education), Tristram Sutton (Apiaries), Will Fry (Resources), Elliot Hodges (Mentoring), Annie McGeoch (Events), Stuart Kenon (trustee only) and Sharon Basse (Asian Hornet).

Congratulations. Congratulations to Lucie Chaumont for passing Modules 6 and 8 and obtaining an Advanced Theory Certificate, Adam Armstrong for passing Module 3 on pests, disease and poisoning, us for getting second place in the “Newsletter” category at the National Honey Show and Adam Armstrong (again) for winning four prizes at the National Honey Show.

Consider joining Cambridge, Somerset and Kent Beekeeping Associations. Annie is an associate member of Cambridge and Somerset BKAs. She enjoys the excellent talks and other activities they put on and thinks their £7 membership fee is great value.

LBKA book lending library. We now have a library and librarian! See members’ area of the website at <https://lbka.org.uk/library>.

NNSS
GB non-native species secretariat
www.nonnativespecies.org
Produced by Lucy Cornwell, Olaf Booy (NNSS), Gay Marrs, Mike Brown (National Bee Unit) with assistance from Colette O’Flynn (National Biodiversity Data Centre Ireland) Stuart Roberts (BWNSS)

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 in/on 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 25 mm long
Entirely dark brown or black velvety body, bordered with a fine yellow band
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 ‘hawking’ for honey bee prey

Photos from: J. Haxaire; Rachel Scopes and Nigel Jones; Richard Ball

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 (*Urocerus 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

Hornet mimic hoverfly (*Volucella 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

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 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.nationalbeeunit.com

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

Asian Hornet Identification leaflet. Source: [BBKA website](http://www.bbka.org.uk).



We have bees at Battersea Children's Zoo. Annie inspects them weekly at this time of year. This week she has some extra little helpers! The feathers are handy for gently brushing away bees and they are also equipped with a magnifying glass ("all the better to see you with!")

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

Asian Hornet. The Asian Hornet sub-committee reported back on progress. The committee agreed to pay for the Trappit Asian Hornet bait for LBKA apiaries and LBKA members but only if part of LBKA's Asian Hornet Action Plan. The committee also thanked Annie for running stalls at various south London events/venues.

Monthly Meeting. It was decided that it would be too cold for a Shook Swarm demonstration at Sunday's Monthly meeting (April 14th). Something else related would be done, but we are yet to confirm the venue

Introduction Courses. The first weekend of the Introduction Courses are sold out. We are still taking booking for the second.

Social Media. Aidan and Annie have discussed Social Media with Yohanna and Rebecca. Proposal to create a WhatsApp Group for members to suggest items/posts that could go on Instagram with Aidan to manage postings.

Apiaries. Work at Eden is now on hold until Summer because more help is required and the apiary is not currently operational. Luke Whyatt's contribution has been much appreciated. Our Hyde Park apiary needs two new colonies. This apiary provides an opportunity for those who used to attend Holland Park. The committee approved Tristram's request for two replacement colonies for those lost at Hyde Park. It was decided that LBKA apiaries and observation hives should be given priority so that they are in a functioning state. LBKA to half cover the cost of two colonies for observation hives. LBKA is also prioritise provision of swarms to mentors who require a colony for mentoring purposes in the swarms group.



Annie's stall at LBKA's second Asian Hornet Roadshow in Herne Hill.

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. There should normally be sufficient available forage for the bees to be self-sufficient if the weather holds good. Stores are currently lower than usual in my own hives due to the very mild winter. It is important for the beekeeper in April, given the weather, to ensure that the colony is not starving. 2 full frames of stores should be sufficient to avoid starvation in the event of a few days bad weather which prevents flying.

The other major job is to commence regular inspection for queen cells. Swarms have already started to appear. The inspections should be on a regular weekly basis. I always undertake this job on the same day each week.

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

- Remove mouseguards and replace with a clean, sterilised entrance block.
- 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 is 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.
- Varroa mites. Check mite drop if not already done in March.
- Asian Hornet. Maintain vigilance and try to keep



Mary Walsh took some traps lend by Sharon and Luke to show to Beekeepers in Westport Co Mayo. Source: Mary Walsh.

informed about what is currently happening regarding this predator.

- 1st full inspection. If not done in March then the 1st full inspection and spring cleaning of the hive should be carried out. The 1st entry can then be made into the colony records. From then on regular inspections should be made.

When inspecting a colony, 5 questions should always be asked and actions taken if appropriate.

1. **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.
2. **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.
3. **Are there any queen cells?** Queen cups are to be expected and should be ignored unless contain-



From the Ballina and Westport Beekeepers: "What a great day and evening we had at the monthly meeting we had 3 most excellent speakers. With a most informative talk about the Asian Hornet delivered by Mary Walsh. David Lee gave a great talk about swarming and Mark Wallace gave us some nice tips. A special thank you to the hotel who delivered a lovely meal for nearly 60 beekeepers". Source: Mary Walsh.

ing an egg or larva. Queen cells require swarm control action by the beekeeper. If the colony has insufficient space (question 2 above) then swarming becomes more likely as the pheromones do not freely circulate. Add a super if necessary.

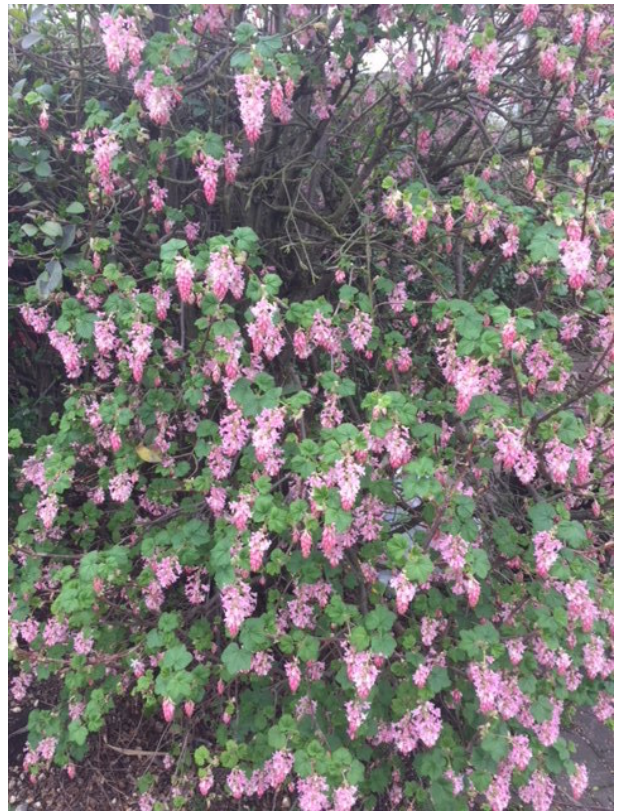
4. **Are there signs of disease?** This is a comprehensive question but the strategy is best approached by being familiar with healthy brood. Anything that does not fit this description is, prima facie, suspicious. Healthy unsealed brood is pearly white in colour, evenly laid, segmented and lies in a "C" shape in the cell. Healthy sealed brood is light brown in colour, evenly laid and with slightly raised dome cappings.
5. **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.

Finally, I do hope you all have an enjoyable and successful beekeeping season for 2024. I hope you do not encounter the Asian Hornet and that you meet whatever beekeeping aspirations you have for the season.

Focus on Forage

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

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.



Flowering currant.



Marsh marigold.

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



Pulmonaria.

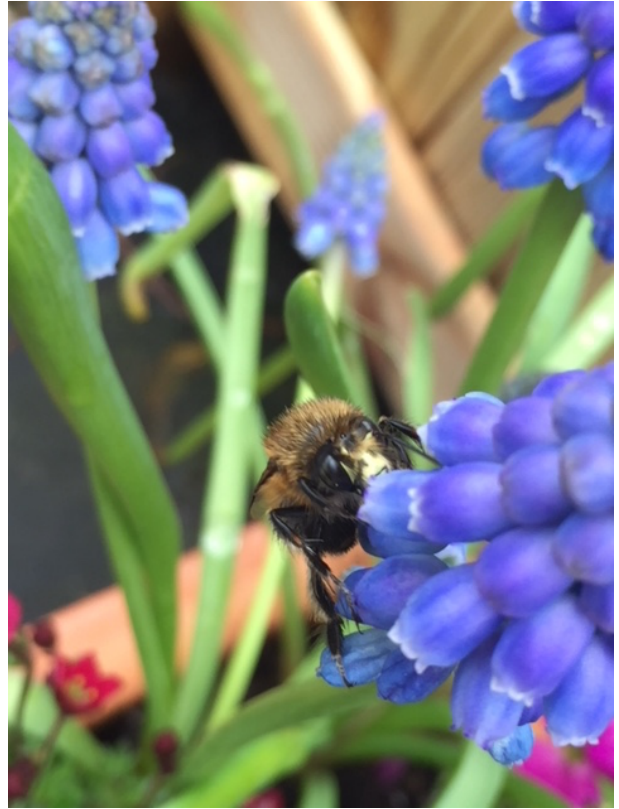


Celandine.

flower I'm noticing lots of **small solitary bees** on at the moment, is **Lesser Celandine**. 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 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 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



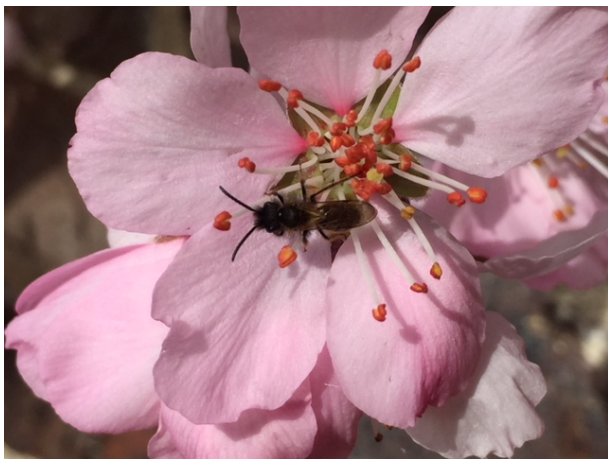
Muscari.



Tulips.

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



Peach blossom in Fulham palace walled garden.



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

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 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 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. 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 list.

Friday 12th - Sunday 14th April: BBKA Spring Convention

All day at Harper Adams University, Edgmond, Newport, Shropshire, TF10 8NB.

The 150 anniversary conference with lectures, Workshops, Seminars and Trade Show. More details at <http://www.bbka.org.uk/springconvention>.

Sunday 14th April: Start of the Beekeeping season

11:00-13:00 at The Sun (47 Old Town, Clapham, SW4 0JL)

The weather forecast isn't great for Sunday's meeting and will probably not be suitable for looking at bees or doing shook swarms as we'd planned. So April's Monthly Meeting will be in a pub – upstairs in The Sun (47 Old Town, Clapham, SW4 0JL) at 11:00 – where we had our AGM. We will talk about bee inspections at this time of year, the Asian Hornet, and may have traps and Trappit for sale (bring a bottle just in case). Some of us will stay for lunch afterwards.

Tuesday 30th April: Pub social

18:30-22:30 at Market House, 443 Coldharbour Lane, London, SW9 8LN.

Our monthly trip to the pub will be at Market House, 443 Coldharbour Lane, London, SW9 8LN.

Sunday 12th May: Bee Health Day

11:00-13:00 at To be confirmed

To be confirmed

Trustees

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
- **Asian Hornet:** Sharon Bassey, asianhornet@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.

