

Friends of the Honey Bee Newsletter

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Happy New Year!

While classrooms come buzzing back to life after the festive period, nature is moving at a gentler pace in our frosty gardens, where many insects remain in a state of winter diapause - a state of dormancy, similar to hibernation in mammals. Yet change is on the horizon. With each passing day growing noticeably longer, the first hints of warmth will soon coax bees and other insects back into activity, ready to fill our surroundings with movement, colour and sound once again. For beekeepers, this is the time of year to get organised and prepare for the upcoming season. In this edition, we explore what this seasonal shift means for honey bees and solitary bees, as well as the learning opportunities ahead.

Have your pupils engaged in any environmentally focused projects or activities? We would love to see the results and share ideas!
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What's Happening in the Hive?



In the wild, honey bees create hives in trees or other suitable spaces. Beehives are designed to replicate wild hives while enabling beekeepers to inspect the colony. [Click here to learn more about beekeeping.](#)

January: Honey bees do not hibernate; instead, they form a tight cluster and generate heat with their flight muscles, keeping the hive between 32 – 35°C. This constant effort requires bees to eat through the stored honey. Beekeepers should monitor hive weight regularly and offer supplementary feed if stores run low.

February: Bees might be seen making cleansing flights to release waste outside the hive, preventing contamination and disease inside the colony, especially after long periods indoors. On warmer days worker bees might be seen foraging on early flowering plants.

March: Beekeepers can start making inspections for adequate stores and healthy bees when temperatures rise above 12°C. Pollen brought in by foragers indicates that the queen is laying again.

April: As the colony begins to expand and rapidly fill the hive with pollen and nectar, beekeepers carry out regular inspections to ensure there's plenty of room for continued growth, and to minimise the risk of swarming - a nuisance for beekeepers and possibly their neighbours!

Who's That Bee?

In Britain we have only one species of honey bee, but around 270 species of other bees! They are wild and many live solitary lives. This year we are following the: [Patchwork Leaf-Cutter Bee, *Megachile centuncularis*](#).



Patchwork Leaf-Cutter Bee

Throughout the winter the Patchwork Leaf-Cutter Bee remains in larval form, tucked in a nest made from leaves inside hollow stems, dead wood or old walls.

The larvae will have fed on the food left by the female bee in autumn, spun a cocoon and pupated. They then overwinter in a state of diapause and emerge in spring as temperatures reach over 20°C.



Honey bee on Hellebore

Gardening for Insects

- Leave dead stems and leaf piles throughout winter. If desired, tidy this when spring arrives, taking care not to disturb hibernating insects. [More info here.](#)
- Deep containers that collect rainwater can trap insects so cover them, empty often, and provide escape ramps similar to a [bee watering station](#).
- Begin planning your wildlife friendly garden and start sowing seeds indoors. [Information on plants for pollinators can be found here.](#)



Does your school have a wildlife garden or any features for insects? Please share with us!

Protecting Pollinators

Honey bees are pollinating insects, alongside at least 1,500 other insects in the UK!



Pollination is an essential ecosystem service.



Three quarters of crops grown in the UK require insect pollination.



Pollinating insects are in rapid decline, many factors contribute to this such as:

Asynchrony

As climate change intensifies, plants are found to be adjusting their seasonal timings four times faster than insects in response to changing environmental conditions. Throwing key interactions like pollination out of sync.

Invasive non-native species

Invasive species, such as Yellow Legged Asian Hornet, can compete with, predate, or spread disease among native species. This can disrupt ecosystems and the services they provide, an important topic when discussing species, interactions and interdependencies.



These issues affect all native wildlife, see the [State of Nature Report](#) for more information.



Keeping bees at your school

Beekeeping can be a great benefit to schools and can have a huge impact on pupils. It takes a lot of planning and is best done with an experienced beekeeper.

This is a great time of year to [find local beekeepers](#) and begin discussing the potential to keep bees at your school!



Become a Beekeeper



BBKA Beacon Schools

[BBKA Beacon School status](#) is awarded to those schools who demonstrate sustained best practice in beekeeping and apiculture. We currently have three Beacon schools: [Ashbrow School](#), [Oakgrove School](#) & [Southend High School for Boys](#). For more information contact: schools.officer@bbka.org.uk

World Wildlife Day: 3rd March

A global celebration of the world's wild animals and plants; brings a chance to discuss plant life cycles, pollination and the role that bees play. Leading to discussions about animal adaptations or where food comes from and other ecosystem services. Find pollination activities at [BBKA](#) and [BBC Teach](#).



Bees in the Curriculum

Yellow-Legged Asian Hornet Awareness



Earth Day: 22nd April

A day for raising awareness and support for environmental protection. Pupils could study pollination and threats to bees in groups and present to the class as a way to introduce environmental campaigns which support honey bees and other insects in the UK. Resources to [celebrate this day](#) and [ways to connect with nature](#).