

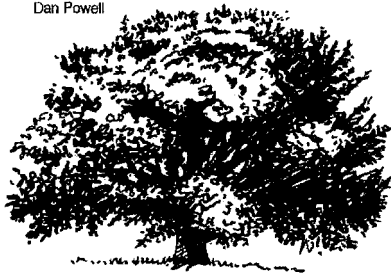
BUSHY PARK & HONEY BEES

Honey bee hives have been maintained in Bushy Park since shortly before World War II (circa 1935). Originally the apiary was in the Pheasantry, and the beekeeper for many years was Sergeant Bernard North, who served in the police at Teddington Station until 1957, when he retired from the force. He is now well into his 90s and, although quite active, no longer keeps honey bees. Bernard's hives at some point were relocated to the donkey field behind the stockyard. Around 1980, Bernard handed over to Ted Chatley, who recently handed the apiary over to Mike Gill, the current beekeeper. Mike has since worked with the park rangers to move the apiary site further away from the stockyard, to increase safety for the public and to provide extra working space. In exchange for the apiary location, Mike is on call to the park rangers to assist with swarms and wasps' nests. He also provides hands-on workshops at the rangers' request.

The Bushy Park apiary is now home to 8-12 operational hives, producing honey that can be bought locally. The hives are maintained in a quiet cluster of trees behind the stockyard, where they receive morning sun (essential to enable the bees to warm up and start flying) and yet are in shade for the rest of the day to stop the hives from overheating. From here they fly up to two miles foraging for pollen, nectar and water.

The mixture of trees in the park provides a plentiful supply of food throughout the season. Chestnut Avenue is a prime foraging spot in May,

Oak Tree
Dan Powell



and hawthorn, lime and oak also provide plentiful sustenance. Honey bees are quite specialised foragers and are far less likely to seek out non-native species such as the azaleas and rhododendrons in the Woodland Gardens, as their probosces are not long enough to reach down the flower tubes. This specialisation does not exclude the soft fruit to be found on the

Bushy Park allotments. Bees have been known to produce a batch of red-tinted honey from ripe plums they have found on the tree.

While the honey bees feast on the trees and smaller plants in Bushy Park, birds in their turn are able to grow fat on the bees. Woodpeckers in particular are a pest to beekeepers, in that they drill into the hives to pick out both bee adults and grubs. A chicken wire cage around the hive is the only way to fend off a hungry woodpecker. It is presumed that birds are immune to the occasional bee sting, or there would be no birds left!

If you would like to know more about bees and beekeeping, the local association in Twickenham can be found at www.twickenham-bees.org.uk



Great Spotted
Woodpecker
Mike Langman (RSPB)