

## REGENT STREET HONEY BEES – W/C 03.08.20

Whilst we continue to navigate turbulent times and many of us start to venture out and return to the workplace – the Regent Street honey bees have kept up regular foraging flights. Throughout July they've collected abundant nectar and pollen from the lime tree blossoms and clover from the park areas as well as all the other nectar opportunities in the near vicinity. Very locally there are approximately 35 metres of lavender plants at roof level, wildflower gardens located on biodiverse roof areas and external living walls. The bees are doing very well – with plenty of room in their hives for the queen to grow the colony and for the bees to store their expanding honey pantry.

However, as we know, not all is rosy for the honey bee. Some years ago, it was apparent UK honey bees along with European honey bees had to deal not just with loss of natural habitat, pesticides and extensive mono-culture but also a new pest – the Varroa mite (shown in image).



This mite is now endemic across honey bee colonies around the world and without treatment can lead to the loss of a colony. Varroa destructor is an external parasite that feeds on honey bee fat body tissue creating stress factors within the colony - the bites from the varroa become infected and weaken the bees, often leading to a shorter lifespan. The mites are vectors for bee viruses including deformed wing virus – this is when the wings shrivel and the bee can no longer fly. Beekeepers have found ways to keep the mite under control by practicing an integrated pest management system.

It's important to monitor the levels of varroa – this can be as simple as counting the 'varroa drop', the number of varroa that drop off the bee and become trapped between the mesh floor of the hive and a temporary floor insert below. If the number is high there are many types of natural products that can be used to keep the number of mites under control. This includes icing sugar – when the hive is open, each frame is taken out for inspection and a light dusting of icing sugar is quickly sprinkled over the bees, this encourages the bees to groom each other and knock the mites off their bodies. The mites fall through the mesh floor and can't climb back. Other treatments include application of essential oils such as lemon, mint and thyme oil or prepared products purchased from beekeeping suppliers. Hygiene inside the hive is essential and beekeepers must regularly change the frames the bees live on – doing this at least once a year is crucial. Beekeepers are now breeding bees that are resistant to these mites as a permanent solution.

We are beginning to think about preparing for the honey harvest at Regent Street – and maybe a short film to share with you.



Lime Tree Blossom



Clover in flower