

A year in the life of the Montgomeryshire BKA apiary at Gregynog.

As we near the end of the year, and a strange year for many 2020 has been, its good to take time out to look back and see what we have achieved this year at the Gregynog Apiary. Roger Stone and Bill Gough after many years managing the apiary, took the decision early in the year to handover the reins. A working party met at Greygnog in early March, to perform a number of tasks, including a review of the existing hives and apiary equipment. The apiary at the start of the year consisted of eight colonies, three of which were weak of which only one survived into the spring. The team was then impacted by the Covid crisis with the lockdown commencing at the end of March. Fortunately bee keepers nationwide were exempt the travel restrictions to ensure apiaries were managed. The colonies were treated in May with MAQS to protect against Varroa, in addition during July all hives were given standardised varroa floors.



Rachel Kellaway took on the management responsibility of the apiary, and developed a support team. The team consists of Jill Hill, Liz Childerley, Joy Sisley, Anne Wren, Mark Swain and Chris Wyton. Through a combined team effort tasks got completed. Liz rearranged the shed, ably assisted by Ian Hubbuck who constructed the internal shelving. Glyn Morris repainted the bee stands. Mark Swain restored and repainted many of the hive parts.



The apiary received a donation of two colonies from Noel Eaton in gratitude for help given with his apiary by Rachel, Pete, Liz and Jill. The colonies were inspected by Shane Jones (seasonal Bee inspector) prior to the transfer to new hives. Three Nucs were produced this season. One was sold and the other two retained to build up the apiary stock. No swarms have been lost but artificial swarms were carried out in colonies preparing to swarm.

The focus at the beginning of the year was to uplift the apiary to enable it to be a useful training resource to both new and existing MBKA members. To facilitate this, a number of new protocols were put in place regarding Health and Safety and Biosecurity. This included safe disposal of smoker fuels, members signing in, everyone using disposable gloves and using the foot bath, hive tools being put in washing soda after use and wax collected in a bucket. In addition to the new shelving Ian Hubbuck also put in place an awning attached to the bee shed.



This year's new members, some of whom are shown opposite have benefitted from the training facility. The team have attended the apiary each of the Sundays throughout the summer and undertaken supervised sessions to inspect the colonies and give valuable experience in handling the bees, using the five Ted Hooper inspection principles. In addition to this training a number of spotlight sessions were delivered, being available to all members. These sessions covered Varroa Treatment, Honey Extraction, Feeding Bees and Preparation for Winter.

The apiary ends the year with 10 colonies. No honey was harvested this year, and in fact the bees have needed regular feeding during autumn. Paul Aslin inspected the apiary during August and was impressed with the improvements made. A further treatment of MAQS was applied, and a plan is in place to treat the colonies during December with oxalic acid. The management of the apiary shed has now been handed over, into the capable hands of Joy Sisley who recently undertook a full inventory. The apiary now has sufficient equipment with only a small number of items required for 2021. In addition to the national hives, Mal Shears has located within the apiary a Warre and a Kenyan hive. These will be populated with bees during 2021 and will provide an alternative experience for our members to observe.

The colonies go into the winter period in a good healthy condition, mouse guards fitted, queen excluders removed and fondant feed in place on those hives requiring additional food. During November the team have taken the opportunity to tidy up the apiary, raking the leaves and levelling off some of the uneven ground. Spring bulbs have been planted and there are plans to plant a number of 'bee friendly' plants ahead of the spring. Further plans are already being formulated for 2021 with Ferol Richards tasked to revamp the visitor shelter.



Jill Hill gathers the leaves.



Joy and Mark planting spring bulbs.



Jill Hill gathers more leaves.