MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

The BeeHolder

Autumn 2021

Berriew Show in August

Jill Hill at the MBKA stand

Editorial

Dip into this issue and you will find encouraging signs that life, if not quite as it was pre-covid, is at last returning to some semblance of normality for our members. Our apiary at Gregynog has been busy, not only with healthy colonies but with courses for beginners together with sessions for all members run by our hardworking apiary team. Why not read about their exam successes too.

MBKA was also very much in evidence at the Berriew Show this year, a return that was welcomed by everyone. Nor is that all for a programme of monthly talks has begun again at Plas Dolerw in Newtown. Read all about Russ Colman's fascinating talk entitled 'stings - the sharp end of beekeeping'.

Do read about the danger of pesticides and action you should take if your bees have been poisoned.

There is a review to capture your attention. Mal Sheers recommends a fascinating book entitled 'Bee Alchemy' and finally a feature on MBKA member David Morris.

Carolle

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MBKA Apiary at Gregynog in 2021

As we move towards the end of the year, it is good to review on how the year has passed at the apiary. The apiary team consists of Rachel Kellaway, Jill Hill, Ferol Richards, Joy Sisley, Chris Wyton and Mark Swain. This year has seen two further members joining, Brian Norris a knowledgeable and experienced bee keeper and also Paul Barnes a keen bee-keeper who is in his second year of bee keeping.

The team were very pleased in March, that upon their first inspections that all 10 colonies had successfully come through the winter months. Fortunately the Covid virus did not impact us as much this year as the previous year, it did however slightly impact on this years new bee-keepers.

Colony inspection on Sunday the apiary team at work

The apiary has had a very good year in terms of both a training resource for this year's new bee-keepers and from a bumper honey harvest. Once again the apiary support team attended the apiary each of the Sundays throughout the summer and undertook supervised sessions to inspect the colonies and give valuable experience in handling the bees. The large 2021 intake of new members have really benefited from the training facility. In addition to this a number of spotlight sessions were delivered and available to all members. These sessions covered Varroa Treatment, Honey Extraction, Feeding Bees and Preparation for Winter.

Inspecting a frame

The apiary was used in July by the WBKA to run a General Husbandry assessment, and several participants commented on how calm the bees were and what a good resource the apiary was.

The apiary is entering the winter period with 11 colonies, varroa treatment has been applied, with a further treatment of oxalic acid being applied to four of the colonies with the further seven colonies expected to be treated during November.

During the next couple of weeks the mouse guards will be fitted, queen excluders removed and fondant feed put in place on those hives requiring additional food. Finally some maintenance work is to be planned before the end of the year, to replace some of the worn mesh on the visitor observatory hut and also repairs to the apiary shed floor to make it mouse-proof.

The apiary equipment shed at Gregynog has undergone an extensive makeover with new shelving and renovated brood boxes and supers.

Mark Swain

Exam successes

Congratulations to Liz Childerley, Ferol Richards and Maia Wells who passed the BBKA Basic Assessment this summer. This involved checking their competency in making a frame, inspecting a colony and identifying brood at all stages and the 3 castes of honey bee, and answering a comprehensive series of questions about the theory of beekeeping. Ferol has described her experience elsewhere in the BeeHolder. Although it seems rather daunting, it is a useful thing to undertake after a year or two of beekeeping: to reassure you that you have the basics right and you are doing the best for your bees.

Rachel Kellaway demonstrating how to split a colony to the 'Bee Improvers' class

Congratulations also to Rachel Kellaway, our training officer. She passed the General Husbandry exam which involved a 3 ½ hour grilling by two examiners, including an inspection of all her kit and honey processing equipment to make sure it was squeaky clean and in good nick. She had to demonstrate several beekeeping manipulations including a disease inspection, a Bailey Comb change, the correct method for transporting bees, and preparing a nuc ready for sale. The examiners asked about honey processing, diseases and the effects of poisoning, and inspected 6 jars of her honey (3 clear and 3 set) and 3 bars of clean wax. They also examined her queen-rearing programme. Not an assessment to be taken by the faint-hearted (or those of us who may be chaotic beekeepers!) and no surprise that very few beekeepers undertake this Herculean task!

Poisoning by Pesticides

In the 1950s insects were killed by direct poisoning due to agricultural practices of the time. These days insecticides have changed, as well as their application. People are more aware of the need to protect pollinators.

There is a Code of Practice for using Plant Protection Products. This tells users to inform beekeepers or Spray Liaison Officers 48 hours before applying pesticides, but there is no legal requirement for this to happen except in the case of aerial spraying,

It's well worth while to tell your neighbouring farmer that you keep honeybees, especially if you live within two miles of an attractive floral crop. If the farmer informs you that spraying is going to happen, shut your bees in the night before and open up a couple of hours after spraying has stopped. MBKA are informed by the Environment Agency when there is going to be bracken spraying.

Piles of dead or dying bees in great numbers in front of the hive, with bees that are still alive, spinning on their backs, is an indication of poisoning. Some may have an extended proboscis. Death occurs over a short period, so bees decompose at the same time.

If you suspect poisoning

- Photo the pile of dead bees
- Note the colour of pollen loads
- Note any spinning
- Note proboscis extension
- Note if guard bees are repelling incoming foragers
- Note what is in flower in the area
- Record wind direction and temperature
- Collect 200 – 300 bees so you have 3 samples. Freeze two send one to the NBU with apiary and farm locations
- Inform the Wildlife Incident Investigation Scheme

Monty Bees at the Berriew Show

After 18 months of restrictions and lockdowns – finally a show! It was great to be back and nice to see it well attended. Hopefully next year will be even better for our shows generally, life has to go on, albeit sensibly. This year, the table was arranged differently with the addition of boxes to add a little height which enhanced the look of what we were selling. Thanks to Paul and Paulin Aslin, we had some lovely creams and waxes as well as usual the honey soap and candles. The Apiary came up trumps with honey which sold very well.

A big thanks to the team who came along to help: Jill, Ferrol, Kerrie, Joy and Mark for giving us a hand to put up the dome. It was a thoroughly enjoyable day.

Inside our stand at the Berriew Show

Anne Wren

Autumn Planting for Pollinators

Autumn is the time when gardens glow with oranges and yellows, and as the season progresses, leaves on the trees turn shades of red and gold (well some do) before finally falling and becoming dormant for the winter months. It's important that beekeepers make the most of this time to help our bees store as much honey and nectar as they can to see them through the colder seasons.

Fortunately, there is still an abundance of plants that will flower profusely even as the days start to shorten. Many of these are from the daisy family, and have the characteristic ray of petals surrounding the central flower head. The key thing is to look for open simple flowers that the bees can access for pollen and nectar.

Asters are one the best known of the garden plants, also referred to as michaelmas daisies, and come predominantly in shades of pink, mauve white and blue. Some have been bred to be compact plants suitable for pots; others can grow tall and may need staking. Pictured here: Aster 'Little Carlow'

Another useful group of plants are the heleniums, rudbeckias and echinaceas originating in North America, and blooming from late July through to September and October. Heleniums are commonly known as sneezewort, because reputedly, the plant can be dried and made into a sneezing powder which helps to clear the sinuses. whilst rudbeckias and echinaceas go by the common name of cone-flowers.

Rudbeckia fulgens '*Goldsturm*'

A successful garden plant which many of you may already have in your garden is the Sedum or Ice Plant as it is often called. This will reliably flower year after year, but can have a tendency to flop because of the heavy flat heads beloved of insects. The advice is to resist overwatering; a bit of ‘tough love’ can help to keep them upright. If all else fails, they can be staked, and if you have had them for some years, it’s worth considering digging it up and dividing it at the end of the season.

Whilst many of the dahlias have been bred to have multi-petalled heads that can look wonderful, they are no use at all for the bees.There are however much simpler, but just as attractive dahlias that the bees can access, and non better than the Bishop of Llandaff, a stunning open flower.

Another widely available plant worth a mention is the Japanese Anemone, but again, try to steer clear of the more recently bred double varieties if your objective is provide for pollinating insects.
Anenome 'Queen Charlotte'

Verbena bonariensis has become very fashionable in recent years. It will self seed freely if you let it, and looks good mixed in with other plants where its ‘see-through’ characteristics means that it can be placed towards the front of the border without blocking the plants behind.

Stings - The Sharp End of Beekeeping

Russ Colman's witty and hugely informative talk entitled 'The Sharp End of Beekeeping' heralded a very welcome return of monthly meetings at Plas Dolerw on Monday 27th September. Russ took us into the fascinating world of bee biology which not only gave us a detailed understanding of the sophisticated and complex anatomy of a bee sting and analysis of bee venom but importantly a practical guide on how to deal with bee stings.

As anyone who has ever been stung will know, a bee sting remains embedded in the skin and as you probably know should be scraped off with your nail or something like the edge of a credit card or hive tool. Do you know that you have just 20 seconds to scrape away the sting to be truly effective and that is because the sting itself is a very complex piece of engineering whose function is to keep delivering venom until the stings balloon like sack is empty. Barbs have been driven into the skin to secure the sting whilst a pair of lancets within the sting work up and down like pistons to deliver the venom from the sack which is why, incidentally, you should on no account pinch the sting to remove it.

As it lands and stings the bee is also fanning its wings to spread the alarm pheromone far and wide which is why any bees from the colony make a bee line for you. Russ points out that smoke has a significant masking effect.

So how do you deal with a sting and how seriously is it affecting you? Russ suggests that an ice pack applied to the site for 15 minutes is the best remedy to reduce swelling and relieve pain. From this own experience, when he needs to deal with a particularly difficult colony he takes an anti-histamine beforehand which helps reduce reaction to a sting. Ibuprofen and paracetamol relieve pain too but be wary of aspirin as one of the ingredients in bee venom is an anti-coagulant.

So what about that scariest of all reactions, anaphylactic shock whose symptoms can include difficulty in breathing or swallowing, cramps and vomiting. The good news for beekeepers is that it is rare but for anyone who has had increasingly severe reactions then it makes sense to ask your doctor for an EpiPen which, should your body go into anaphylactic shock is a life saver.

There is some confusion about who, apart from the victim, can use an EpiPen but the law is clear if you have an EpiPen and if your body has gone into anaphylactic shock and you cannot administer it yourself then another person can administer it for you.

Russ, who has spent many years as a medic and a director of a first aid company, advised us that the very first thing to do is to administer the EpiPen into the top of the thigh the second is to dial 999 and the third is to stay with that person until a professional arrives.

Happily, the odds of dying from a bee sting are tiny, 20 a year. Statistically you are more likely to be struck by lightening and on the plus side, although no serious study has been made it seems that beekeepers are less prone to arthritis which the Chinese treat with bee venom.

Bees in the news

First Asian hornet found in the UK this year

There has been a sighting of an Asian hornet (Vespa velutina) in the Ascot area of Berkshire: Asian hornet identified in Ascot - GOV.UK (www.gov.uk). This is the first UK sighting since September 2020.

The asian hornet is distinguishable by its black body and yellow legs

The Asian hornet is a species of hornet that is not native to the UK. It is smaller than our native hornet and single hornets pose no greater risk to human health than our native wasps and hornets. However, they do pose a risk to honey bees and pollinating insects. This is why we are keen to stop this insect establishing in the UK, and we are asking people to report suspected sightings.

An asian hornet nest

It is important to take care not to approach or disturb a nest. Asian hornets are not generally aggressive towards people but an exception to this is when they perceive a threat to their nest.

If you suspect you have seen an Asian hornet you should report this using the iPhone and Android app 'Asian Hornet Watch' or by using the online report form. Alternatively, e-mail alertnonnative@ceh.ac.uk. Please include a photograph if you can safely obtain one. Identification guides and more information are available.

Bee hotel

Here's an idea for those of you busy beekeepers. A resourceful farmer in Croatia is offering a "hotel" for bees for people who want to keep bees but are too busy to look after them. Interested people buy a beehive with a colony of bees, sign a 3-year contract, and collect half the honey produced by that colony during the contracted period. The farmer does all the hard graft. 25 "bee-owners" have signed up, mostly from Croatia but include a pilot from Dubai and a football coach from Jeddah!

Bees kill penguins!

This story sounded like an April Fool item! 63 endangered penguins were found dead on a beach near Cape Town. Post-mortem showed no injuries except for evidence of multiple bee stings around their eyes. Normally, the bees and penguins live together peacefully, but Dr Alison Kock, marine biologist with the South African National Parks, said the presence of many dead honey bees nearby suggests the penguins must have disturbed a nest of bees.

https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/sep/20/bees-kill-63-endangered-penguins-in-south-africa

Next Winter Evening Meeting

29th November, 7.00pm to 9.00pm

Plas Dolerw. Milford Road, Newtown, SY16 2EH

Horticulturist and commercial beekeeper William Denne will give a talk on bee farming and the community project.

Book Review - Honey Bee Alchemy by Valery A. Isidorov

If you are both a beekeeper and a chemist, you'll find this book a dream come true. If you don't consider sciences to be your forté, a brief flick through its pages, which include extensive chemical compound lists and tables, structural formulae and chromatograms, may leave you feeling that it's just not your cup of tea. But it would be worth lingering longer as amongst all the scientific data lie some real gems.

Professor Valery Isidorov is a member of the Russian Academy of Natural Sciences, and for many years he headed the Department of Environmental Chemistry at the University of Bialystok. His self-translated book, first published in Poland in 2013 and subsequently extensively revised is meant for lovers of honeybees, and his own love, respect, and fascination for the animal shines through in the text. In over 45 years of research he says that nothing else has given him more pleasure. In recent years his work has been focused on bee health and possible ways of treatment by avoiding synthetic drugs and their unwanted side effects. The tools of his trade have been gas chromatography and mass spectrometry, which have been applied to researching the content of bee products including honey, propolis, and royal jelly, even drone homogenate (you'll have to read chapter 4 to find out what that is)! This is not a dry scientific tome, Professor Isidorov retains a sense of mystery and magic in which the bees are alchemists, agents of transmutation, converting the products of flowering plants into sophisticated and complex creations of their own.

As a chemist, Isodorov finds the use of chemical substances to exchange information most interesting. Honeybees have a highly-developed and complex system involving 15 glands which are developed differently and produce special substances with reference to which of the three castes (queen, worker or drone) that make use of them. The queen operates her "levers of power" through her attendants (there are always 10-12 worker bees surrounding her). This retinue, who are always touching the queen with their antennae and

licking her with their tongues obtain signal chemical substances called pheromones which are spread to other members of the colony as her attendants regularly change. Pheromones come in two main types, releasers and primers, and many exist in the insect world, but what is very special about the honeybee is that it alone produces primer pheromones: these are used to form definite patterns of behaviour and to influence the development of physiology. One typical primer, released by the queen, suppresses the reproductive systems of other female bees and their development of maternal instinct. Isodorov discusses the illnesses threatening bees, and notes the main causes to be the ever-mounting pressure on nature caused by an ever-growing human population, which in turn has facilitated the uncontrolled migration of pathogens over long distances. One significant problem for bees arising from this is Varroatosis, and he devotes much discussion to that; highlighting its singularity in affecting both brood and adults, and bringing harm to the bee family all year round, whilst most other diseases are seasonal in nature. He reports how Polish beekeepers (I think he refers to commercial ones) that he has spoken with have been unanimous in saying that Apismellifera have no chance in surviving without constant medical help from humans. On the other hand, he speaks of some amateur beekeepers amongst many countries that disagree, who say that domestic bees will cope with all their problems if they are freed from what might be described as ‘agri-business’ conditions, and above all are released from treatment with synthetic chemicals. To this latter group who have embarked on natural selection of disease resistant bees he wishes success “with all my heart”. If you are mainly in the market for a ‘how-to’ manual then save your money - there are several excellent ones in existence and you could buy 2 or 3 of them for the price of this one book! If however you’d like the bees to take your education up a notch then give serious consideration to buying it, in the author’s own words: “We have to admit that the natural pharmacy of bees is incomparably more effective than the entire modern chemical and pharmaceutical industry and we have a lot to learn from them”

Mal Shears Alternative Beekeeping Member

David Morris - In The Frame

David Morris has been keeping bees for over fifty years, and I wanted to know how he looked on beekeeping. Was it a hobby, was it an interest, or perhaps it was a passion? David didn't hesitate - "A passion", he said. From when he first encountered bees as a young man in the Newtown area and started learning the fine art of beekeeping he was hooked! When he moved to Worcestershire in the early 1970's he set up his own colonies in home-made national hives. Yes, they were made of plywood from offcuts, but this was plywood used in the construction of railway carriages. He was able to buy a trailer load and to this day some of those original hives are still in use.

Talking of the 1970s, one of his strongest memories is the introduction of oil seed rape. Although rape has been a crop for centuries, this Canadian oil seed rape was, and still is low in erucic acid, making palatable cooking oil. This was the beginning of a crop which now paints the countryside yellow every Spring and is a major source of nectar for pollinators. David looked out at his first field of gold and with the blessing of the farmer, brought his hives to what proved to be heaven for bees but hell for the beekeeper. For the first time when handling bees he was forced to wear gloves whilst moving his dozen hives out of range of that tempting sea of yellow. What is now known is that the nectar from 'Canola', which is what this variant was called, boosted the energy and therefore the aggressiveness of the bees.

Twenty four years ago David and Frances returned to Wales and settled in the hills above Kerry, where beekeeping at 1250 feet above sea level has its own challenges. The season is much shorter than "down country", there is far less forage available and some years no honey to take off at all.

But this is certainly not a money making for thing for David, who says that he just likes keeping bees for their own sake. He concentrates on breeding dark bees, which may not be so productive but are far hardier and more suited to this height than most imports Every two or three

years he buys a dark queen to widen the gene pool. Surplus queens he tends to give away and also makes nucs to sell. He currently keeps twenty or so colonies and overwinters a few nucs. In the season, he inspects the hives every seven days whenever possible. As he says, “bees can’t read” so they don’t know that text books recommend inspection at 10 day intervals. His experience has shown that there might be no sign of a queen cell and then, on day eight, they’ve flown.

Some of David's National Hives date back to the 1970s

Always happy to help anyone, he is currently mentoring two new beekeepers. His advice to new beekeepers is to always take time and work quietly when inspecting bees, and on the same day each week if possible. He suggests using rotten wood in the smoker, (for, as he points out, the glue in corrugated paper is full of chemicals,) and let the smoke drift into the hive gently. He believes beekeeping is an art, not a science and (whatever the books say) must be adapted to local conditions and circumstances.

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Please feel free to contact any member of the committee with any questions, or if you can volunteer time to help with any aspect of the association.

For website imput or issues contact David at webadmin@montybees.org.uk