



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS  
ASSOCIATION**

# **The BeeHolder**

**Spring 2022**



**Apple Blossom in Spring**

# Editorial

Whether you attended the AGM or not, Jill Hill's account and Joy Sisley's report of MBKA's activities during the year make interesting reading. They illustrate what an active and involved bunch Monty beekeepers are.

Mark Swain will fill you in on Gregynog apiary and its team. Training sessions for both beginners and improvers are in full swing and you can read all about a recent training session on swarm management and then read all about the NDB course on Bee Behaviour that our training officer, Rachel Kellaway attended along with Secretary, Jill Hill. Jill has written a vivid account of the course as well as the dramatic events unfolding many miles away as her colonies faced a weekend of extreme wind and rain.

Honey fraud is one of the greatest scandals of the food industry and we are being called upon to act and ensure that it is recognised as such. MBKA is also calling for volunteers to act as stewards at summer shows where free admission is offered for a few hours manning the stand. So its roll on summer as we enjoy spring and perhaps think of planting one or more apple trees for the bees.

**Carolle Doyle**

[www.montybees.org.uk](http://www.montybees.org.uk)

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Phone 01686 625250

# Spring 2022 Montgomeryshire BKA apiary at Gregynog

As we quickly move towards the start of the new bee keeping year, the apiary team are getting ready for another busy year of both maintaining the apiary and sharing their knowledge with this year's beginners and the improvers (second year bee keepers).

The apiary team consists of Rachel Kellaway, Jill Hill, Ferol Richards, Joy Sisley, Chris Wyton, Brian Norris, Paul Barnes and Mark Swain. This year has seen two further members joining the existing team, Jill McAloon and Simon Anderson are both new keen bee keepers. Over the winter months some maintenance has been undertaken including repairs to the apiary shed floor to make it mouse-proof. We are still waiting on the replacement mesh becoming available prior to repairing the visitor observation hut.



*Getting ready for an inspection*



*Bluebells in the apiary with the newly populated Warre and Kenyan hives in the background*

At the time of writing this update, the first beginners practical session was being arranged for Sunday 21st March, and this was going to be followed by the first inspections of the 11 colonies. Prior to the inspections all colonies have appeared active on the warmer days that we have had.

**Mark Swain**

## **A Visit to Jim Crundwell Retiring President**

Earlier on in March I visited Jim and June at their home in Evesham. Angie and myself spent a very pleasant and interesting time with them. Jim was telling us that when they left Mid Wales, they were looking for an old property needing work. They bought a house that was built in 1208 in the oldest part of the town. It still has a section of the original flagstone floor.

The Committee gifted them some of the Association honey, which they were very pleased with. Jim has decided to give up driving, so sadly is unable to make the journey to Wales. He has very kindly donated a honey comb cutter and refractometer and the Association will make very good use of both. Thank you Jim and June for your hospitality, we look forward to visiting you again, next time I am in the area.

**Anne Wren**

## **Volunteers wanted for WBKA Summer Shows**

Jill Wheeler, the WBKA Events Secretary, is asking for volunteers to act as stewards on the WBKA stands at the RWAS Spring Festival 21st/22nd May and the RWAS Summer show 18th/19th/20th/21st July.

Stewarding for a few hours gains you free entry into the show. If you want to help please contact Jill Wheeler at: [convention@wbka.com](mailto:convention@wbka.com) stating what day and am or pm for your stewarding slot.

## **Telling the Bees**

A journalist at the BBC, Eliot Stein, is currently working on a book about some of the world's rarest and most wondrous cultural traditions around the world - among them, the age-old British custom of "telling the bees." He has written to ask if we know of someone either in the WBKA or elsewhere who still maintains this tradition with a passion. If so, he would like to profile them in the book. If anyone can help with this please send your contact details to Eliot at [Stein@bbc.com](mailto:Stein@bbc.com)

## Training - All About Swarms

One of the key events in the beekeeping year is the swarming season. So it was with anticipation that The Bee Improvers met for training at Gregynog Hall on the 5th February. A big thank you to Rachel Kellaway for providing a really interesting and informative training session that focussed predominately on swarming and how to prevent it. I think it would be fair to say that the slide every one of us will remember is the one that said 'Don't Panic!' And having been provided with such practical advice and guidance I don't think we will.

The session started with Rachel providing us with a couple of useful titles that would be good to read before 'swarming season' starts, the most useful of these being the BBKA publication 'Swarming'. Next up was a list of the kit needed for the year ahead. Some of this we already knew about e.g. the crown of thorns, and others that we met for the first time such as the 'one handed bee catcher' and the 'Butler cage.'

Rachel outlined the procedure for carrying out our first inspection. First of all, have a plan! This means choosing a calm day with the air temperature of 12C and, before opening the hive, observe the comings and goings at the entrance. Next, a list of questions to answer as the hive is inspected. Things to look out for include signs of dysentery and whether the brood is mainly drone brood. If so, time to get in touch with the experts. This is also a good time to put in a varroa board, prepare supers and make up record cards.

The rest of the session was devoted to swarming and its management. Rachel emphasised that bees will naturally swarm when there is not enough space so it is vital to be on the alert for the first signs of swarming. There are a number of things to look out for such as a large amount of drone brood, a lot of queen cells or overcrowding. Rachel suggested a traffic light system. Green: if there are queen cups just 'keep an eye'. Amber: there are queen cups with eggs, keep a very watchful eye. Red: there is a queen cup being extended with contents - swarming imminent! Time to implement practical swarm control.

We learned that the queen needs space to lay, which means 10 available frames. If the brood box contains frames with lots of pollen these can be removed and replaced with foundation. If the queen is laying really quickly then put a super on and remove the queen excluder.



An alternative way to help prevent swarming is to split the colony. This is a process that requires a lot of thought as there are a number of different stages and possible scenarios to remember. It was great to have a dummy practical session at the end of the training where we were presented with three different situations. A 'willing volunteer' split a colony using two brood boxes, some empty frames and a nuc. The group assisted with advice but if it hadn't been for Rachel intervening, I'm not convinced the split colonies would have had much chance of survival. We let Rachel demonstrate how to use the one-handed bee catcher and Butler cage, definitely a piece of kit that will require practice

This was an excellent session to start the bee keeping year. At 'half time' we enjoyed the opportunity for coffee and a catch up on the progress of our bees. We left feeling well informed, excited and perhaps a little nervous about the year ahead!

**Jill McAloon**

# Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association AGM on February 21st 2022

20 members made it to the 2022 AGM, despite the remains of the terrible weather conditions over the weekend before.

Your new committee was voted in. Joy Sisley has agreed to continue as Chair, Sian Jones continues as Treasurer and is also Membership Secretary, Jill Hill is still secretary and the rest of the committee agreed to continue and were voted "en masse": Rachel Kellaway (Training Officer) Mark Swain (Apiary Manager) Carolle Doyle (BeeHolder editor) Marie Shirley-Smith who has taken over from Liz Childerley to manage the Face Book page, Anne Wren (Events organiser) Mal Shears (Alternative Beekeeping) Ferol Richards (Gregynog visitor observation hut manager) and Kerry Vernon (general support). We also welcomed Jill McAloon and Simon Anderson to the committee.



Pauline Norris presented the Roy Norris Legacy award to Rachel for all her hard work running the training programme despite the restrictions of Covid. She passed the General Husbandry Certificate last year too, the only person in Wales to do so!



Ferol, Liz Childerley and Maia Wells passed the Basic Assessment and Rachel and Jill passed Module 1 (Honey Bee Management).



We finished the evening with a very interesting and entertaining talk by Dr Pauline Norris on beekeeping in Ancient Egypt.

**Jill Hill**

## MBKA Chair's Report

2021 was another challenging year for the Association, but in spite of ongoing Covid restrictions and a cold and wet Spring we got through the year with plenty to be pleased about.

The apiary at Gregynog provided a strong focus for our activities. The apiary support team has grown to include new members who have brought experience and enthusiasm to managing the colonies. After a slow beginning in a rather wet and cold May, the bees got busy. We made up several nucs from colony splits, which we sold to this year's beginners, providing a valuable income for equipment and repairs at the apiary. We went into winter with 11 colonies, all of which seem to be doing well.

Thanks to Rachel Kellaway's apparently limitless energy and efforts we trained 15 new beekeepers. Our beginners benefitted from hands on experience during the summer by working with apiary team members during weekly hive inspections. Under their supervision our beginners gained confidence in handling bees and recognising all stages of bee development. We also held more advanced training sessions for the improvers, entering their second year of beekeeping and the intermediate (year 3 class).



Congratulations to our members Liz Childerley, Ferol Richards and Maia Wells who passed the BBKA Basic Assessment at the apiary this summer. A dozen of our members are now working towards their Basic Assessment, supported by Rachel. In July, the WBKA used the apiary for the General Husbandry Assessment, and several participants commented on how calm the bees were and what a good resource the apiary is. Congratulations to Rachel Kellaway who successfully achieved her General Husbandry. Rachel Kellaway and Jill Hill also passed the Beekeepers Association Module 1 - Honey Bee Management and are both working towards further qualifications.

It is a pleasure to be able to have our regular monthly talks, which have been held at Plas Dolerw in Newtown. The programme was kick-started with a witty and informative talk by Russ Colman on bee stings. We also welcomed Lynfa Davies to talk about bee behaviour and Will Denne who gave us an insight into the challenges of commercial bee farming and invited us to sample his honey vodka, which went down very well. The Season has ended in April this year with a talk about bees by Clive Faulkner of the Montgomery WildLife Trust.

Our small but active committee has met every 6 weeks or so at Plas Dolerw in Newtown, Covid restrictions permitting. My thanks go to each and every one of the members who play an important role in organising events and planning new initiatives. Although not on the committee Chris Leech kindly prints and sends out the Beeholder 4 times a year and Dave Hughes keeps our web-site up to date. And of course thank you to MBKA members who have contributed articles and pictures to Beeholder. Our modest publication reflects the broad church of approaches to beekeeping among our members and we hope you enjoy reading it.

I wish all our members a happy and productive summer with your bees.

**Joy Sisley MBKA Chair**

## **NDB course on Bee Behaviour and after...**

Rachel Kellaway and I were privileged to attend this weekend course held in the Gwersyllt Resource Centre near Wrexham and delivered by master beekeepers, Marin Anastasov and Lynfa Davies. We were two of 16 delegates, mostly from Wales but also beekeepers from Wiltshire and Cambridge. As those of you who have attended the talks given by Lynfa to Monty Bees will know, the quality of the presentations was excellent.

We kicked off by looking at reading material relevant to this topic and it was interesting to see those authors such as Ribbands (1953) Lindauer (1961) von Frisch (1967) were still recommended reading as well as well-known more modern researchers like Tom Seeley. The first session was the population cycle, getting our heads round relatedness and “super sisters”, “full sisters” and “half-sisters” followed by an exercise on population metrics. By coffee time, I was beginning to think I’d taken on more than I could chew. Maths isn’t my forte but luckily my partner Rachel could work out the sums!

The programme continued with homeostasis, communication and control, the intricacies of swarming, reproduction, the division of labour, and foraging. Lynfa and Marin packed a lot of information into the weekend, but the sessions were broken up by doing some fun group exercises working out the pathways and effect of pheromones in all these activities. Lots of coffee breaks with cakes and biscuits and a substantial lunch kept our brains fuelled! We finished the course by discussing what would be expected should we dare to take Module 6 (fortunately, not as high a level as this NDB course!)

### **And After - Bees, floods and being on the telly!**

At lunchtime on the Sunday, when I switched on my mobile phone, I found I had about half a dozen increasingly frantic messages to say the field where one of my out-apiaries was located had flooded. The last message said the hives had been floating about but local people had

cut a hole in the hedge (the gateway was flooded) and moved all the hive parts into the front garden of a nearby house and there didn't seem to be any bees left. No bee suits - what heroes! Rachel and I then had a white-knuckled journey home through floods and raging rivers.

The next day, my husband Mick and I went to the Cwpan Pink café in Llangadfan which is owned by two of the bee rescuers, to thank them and take them a jar of honey. In the car park, we met two chaps one of whom was a beekeeper (from Meirionnydd BKA). He asked what we were doing in bee suits at this time of year and when I told him we were going to check on my drowned bees, he said he was a reporter for BBC Wales and could he do an interview? So, we all went into the café, asked the customers to be quiet (!), and he conducted an interview on his phone. He then met me at the apiary where, to my joy, I found both hives and the nuc intact in the front garden of the house across from the field.



As there seemed to be a few bees flying around them we moved them back to their usual site as the field was back to normal. When I opened up the entrances there were definitely quite a few grumpy bees coming out of all three hives (in fact, rushing out as if to say, “what the .....???”) Anyway, I didn't think the reporter would use the story as it had a happy ending but I was on the local news that night. My 30 seconds of fame!

**Jill Hill**

## Apple Blossom - a Bounty for Bees

Honey bees and apple trees go together and for beekeepers a single apple tree will provide as much nectar and pollen as a wildflower meadow. But if you would like your apple tree to bear lots of fruit it is worth making a note of when it flowers for almost all apple trees need to be cross-pollinated and a few, like Bramley's Seedling, require not one but two different varieties. For beekeepers this isn't so much a stumbling block as an opportunity for by picking trees that flower in early, mid and late spring they are extending the season of blossom for the bees. On labels, in catalogues and on websites varieties will be clearly marked as 1, 2 or 3 which indicates time of flowering although in reality most tend to overlap. Grow six trees, two from each group and your bees can be harvesting nectar and honey for many weeks.

Watch your bees closely and you will see that some collect nectar whilst others collect pollen which is a neat trick for the apple trees as the pollen collectors work faster. If you have ever noticed that with a heavy crop of fruit some apples are malformed and many simply drop in the 'June drop'. The reason for both is inadequate pollination for every blossom has five pistils and each pistil is connected to two ovules and an apple that has been inadequately pollinated will either drop fruit prematurely or the fruit will be malformed. It is worth remembering that crab apple trees are a great source of pollen and are compatible partners to all apple trees.





Every garden, however small, has room for apple trees and with a little ingenuity anyone can grow an entire orchard in a pot. Family trees, also known as 'everyman's orchard' have up to six compatible flowering varieties grafted on to one rootstock. Deacon's nursery on the Isle of Wight have made something of specialty of this introducing a Jenny tree where varieties are 'stacked up' to make a pole like cordon which takes up even less room. Family trees and Jenny trees are grafted on to M26 rootstock which results in an 8 ft high tree.

All houses have walls and every wall can be home to an apple tree trained into a fan, espalier or cordon. Every path could be lined with 'step over' apple trees which live up or should be down, to their name.



**Carolle Doyle**

## **John Williams - In the Frame**

I'm John Williams, a third generation beekeeper living in the Meifod valley where I have grown up with bees. Traditionally my father kept less than 10 hives, mainly using the WBC double walled traditional hive with sloping side although he also made similar hives with simpler, straight sides. The outer lifts were not interchangeable between the similar hive types making management more difficult together with the need for more space around the hive while manipulating the bees. He also used some National hive equipment. In 1959 my father became the first seasonal bee inspector for three years covering the current Powys area.

When I took a keen interest the apiary doubled in size although we discontinued WBC hives in favour of single walled nationals which were more cost effective. With more equipment we maintained 20 hives for many years both at home and on an outlying farm.

Then about 10 years ago I lost all my bees to Varroa. It was time to go back to the beginning. One detail caught my eye in the bee press and that was that some of the Varroa issues were due to the wax foundation having an over large cell size. As a trial I introduced a swarm to a national brood box fitted with half round hazel bars. The result was good combs and a colony that for the 3 years of the trial had no Varroa treatment but survived.

In the following years I used an adapted Warre hive, again without treating for Varroa, but was disappointed with the honey crop.

I now use a homemade frame 'butt' jointed in a jig using screws. The depth of the frame is less than a deep but more than a shallow - one size fits all for brood and honey/cut comb with no need for wire to support the comb. All comb is built down from a wooden 'V' or small piece of plain starter wax fixed using beeswax melted with a soldering iron. Bees build the natural comb in the frames. Quality cut comb is produced with offcuts being crushed and strained without the need to

use a honey extractor. The national super box depth was extended by screwing a strip of wood around the base.

For many years no Varroa treatment has been done and I have experienced almost no winter losses. There is a slightly reduced honey crop due to the natural comb building by the bees but there is also a reduced wax foundation cost and frame preparation work. I now use wool from black sheep for under roof insulation to reduce heat loss and condensation that can wet the bees.



I have also made and tried a long-bar hive and like the no box lifting and minimised comb exposure while manipulating which results in calmer bees. As a result I wish to make a top-bar hive to accommodate my frames. Recent hive designs that have given me inspiration are the Drayton or Dartington long hive with the benefit of better wall insulation. The 'Zest' hive uses insulated house building blocks to help regulate temperature but the current single three frame depth is not practical in my opinion but could be modified.

In future I wish to use one of the more recent types of double walled hives but made to suit my size frames. Looking back the traditional WBC hive had many merits regarding a good environment for the bees and the boxes, being a thinner lighter wood construction together with a reduced number of frames, make it easier to lift full supers.

**John Williams**

## Oven Ready Bees

Last year I decided to start keeping bees. As an absolute total novice I joined Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association. My bees are native as I live high up, 1,500 ft to be exact, in the Shropshire hills after moving from Wales when I married in 2019. Work responsibilities have made it slightly difficult to attend all classes this year but my bees are looking pretty good, having been left to their own devices.

When I inspect my bees I like to try to take photographs of the frames (eye sight not so good!) then I can zoom in on photos later, which is amazing to see!



One of these photos gave me an idea for our newly renovated kitchen which we began last September. The result, a splashback for my new hob, was created by enlarging a photo of one of my frames. I think it looks great and it's certainly a conversation starter!

**Jane Davies**

## Volunteers wanted - Safeguarding

The Management Team are exploring what role, as an umbrella support organisation, the WBKA should and could play in assisting all Member Associations to understand how they can ensure that their activities take account of Safeguarding requirements. We are asking for volunteers with experience of Safeguarding requirements pertaining to beekeeping activities for not only children but vulnerable adults to join a short term working party which will meet virtually. If any of your members are willing to join the working party please contact trustee David Grace at [dgrace1948@googlemail.com](mailto:dgrace1948@googlemail.com) Even if you have responded to this request previously, please contact David again as a computer problem has meant the details of the three or four people who responded before have been lost.

# Honey Fraud

I listened to a fascinating and very worrying lecture at the WBKA convention given by Lynne Ingram. Master Beekeeper and NBD. Here are some facts for you to mull over.

Supermarkets sell honey for 65p for 12oz. Honey fraud has been going on for hundreds of years and is the third biggest food fraud worldwide. Currently this is a technically sophisticated industry on a global scale. Honey is adulterated with sugar syrups e.g. rice, corn. In some Asian countries exports are growing at a greater rate than the number of hives. India has changed suddenly from an importer of honey to an exporter. UK imports 50,000 tonnes of honey mainly from China every year. The jars are rarely labelled as honey from China. Cheap imported honey is blended and labels say 'a blend of non-EU (or EU) honey'. Huge profits are to be made selling adulterated honey. Control measures are absent in the UK, such as fraud monitoring and verification and there is a lack of enforcement. C3 and C4 syrups have been used to adulterate honey but they can be detected through analysis. You can buy, online, sugar syrups that claim they cannot be detected by analysis; it's a Chinese eBay type selling site. Consumers are being duped into thinking they are buying honey and it harms honest beekeeping. A bee farmer in Canada who pollinates blueberry crops cannot sell his honey for profit. Beekeepers in the UK have a petition to protest against the lack of enforcement on those who trade in honey. Apimondia says that honey fraud threatens honey's image as a natural product.

What can you do?

Honey regulations need to be reviewed. You can sign the petition on the Honey Authenticity Network UK website. Share this fraudulent situation. Write to your MP.

**Rachel Kellaway**

## MBKA Committee

PRESIDENT	David Morris
CHAIR	Joy Sisley chair@montybees.org.uk
TREASURER	Sian Jones treasurer@montybees.org.uk
SECRETARY	Jill Hill secretary@montybees.org.uk
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	Sian Jones membership@montybees.org.uk
EDITOR	Carolle Doyle editor@montybees.org.uk
EVENTS	Jill McAloon equipment@montybees.org.uk
ALTERNATIVE BEEKEEPING	Mal Shears natural@montybees.org.uk
APIARY INFORMATION	Ferol Richards spare3@montybees.org.uk
APIARY CONTACT	Mark Swain apiary2@montybees.org.uk
TRAINING AND EXAMS	Rachel Kellaway Simon Anderson training@montybees.org.uk
FACEBOOK	Marie Shirley Smith facebook@montybees.org.uk
SWARM COORDINATION	find a beekeeper near you on the WBKA swarm collection map: <a href="https://wbka.com/swarm-contact-map/">https://wbka.com/swarm-contact-map/</a>

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 input or issues contact David Hughes at [webadmin@montybees.org.uk](mailto:webadmin@montybees.org.uk)