



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS
ASSOCIATION**

The BeeHolder

Summer 2021



Swarm collection

Gregynog Apiary

Editorial

Surely the big news as late spring merged into early summer was the proliferation of swarms. In Monty Bees Apiary at Gregynog alone five of the ten colonies swarmed and you can read about it and what happened to the subsequent nucs in our features on swarm control and our Beginner Beekeeping Course members.

Our regular features, 'Summer Planting for Pollinators' and 'Bees in the News' are informative reads as is the profile of one of Monty Bees members, Brian Norris.

There are two reviews to capture your attention. Mal Sheers, our 'member for alternative beekeeping' recommends a fascinating book on treatment free beekeeping and Kerrie Vernon recommends a dreamy CD of songs all related to bees called 'Songhive'.

These are just a few of the features in this summer issue of 'The Beeholder' which is, without doubt, a very good read. Many articles have been written by MBKA members and we are very grateful for your contributions. So, dear readers, why not write up your experiences in the rich world of beekeeping, I'd love to hear from you.

Carolle

www.montybees.org.uk

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National hives in cedar and pine

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Swarm Control at the MBKA Apiary

The first inspections took place at our apiary at Gregynog during March, we were very pleased that our colonies had all wintered well. The colonies were strong in number and appeared healthy. March in terms of weather conditions was an average month, with the second half being more settled and warmer.

April and early May are always a busy time in the apiary. The weekly inspections (Sunday) are carried out by the apiary team, often accompanied by our newer members. We have adopted the Ted Hooper 'Hoopers Five' method when inspecting our colonies, the five points are as follows;

1. Has the colony sufficient room.
2. Is the queen present and laying the expected quantity of eggs
3. (a) early season is the colony building up in size as fast as the other colonies within the apiary or (b) mid season Are there any queen cells present.
4. Are there any signs of disease or abnormality.
5. Has the colony sufficient stores to last until the next inspection.

In order to prevent swarming of our colonies it is essential to practice regular inspections every seven days (or thereabouts). Even this is not completely safe because colonies can (and sometimes do) go from no sign of queen cells to swarming in as little as four days with not a sealed queen cell in sight.

At the time of writing this update, we have experienced two swarms that we are aware of at our apiary (obviously out-apairies are more difficult to ascertain the actual number). The first swarm was quite easy to capture as it was located low on a fence post, and the team were on hand to capture and re house within a poly hive. The second as per the photos decided to swarm high up in an acer tree alongside the apiary. This was a large primary swarm, which again through working as a team we were able to capture and re-hive.

Whilst speaking with a number of fellow bee keepers this season, it appears that there have been a large number of swarms, this may be down to the weather. April was a settled month, but soon turned very cold, and a notable feature throughout the month was the number of air frosts, overall it was unusually cold, dry and sunny month. Likewise May began unsettled and unseasonably cold with frosts in many places. Probably as a result of this weather, our local bee inspector advised us that a number of colonies he had inspected were short on food, and that we should be extra vigilant on the level off stores within the hives.

This year has been my first as a local swarm collector, and I have received a number of calls, fortunately the majority have been regarding small colonies of masonry bees. There have also been some honey bee swarms, thankfully most have been at a comfortable height to allow capture. When speaking with the people impacted, I have been



pleasantly surprised by their level of interest in the bees especial their welfare. Pictured opposite is a typical swarm, which was located a matter of yards from the hive.

The swarming season extends from sometime in the middle of April to the middle of July but does vary in different parts of the country and particularly in relation to elevation. Possibly one of the most important skills of a bee keeper to master is that of swarm prevention, through the use of various artificial swarming techniques. Wally Shaw has written an article in the Summer 2021 edition of the Welsh Beekeeper with some useful tips. Enjoy your bees

Mark Swain

Beginners Buzzing As They Obtain Nucs

Monty Bees have sourced nucs for anyone who has successfully completed the Beginners Course and the 'newbees' group is buzzing with excitement.



Caroline Vaughan sent this picture of transferring the bees into her National Hive and says 'That was pretty intense. The smoker stayed lit! Queen seen. Now just waiting for the ones that didn't transfer on the frame to find the door.'

Julien Grouteau writes this about making a top bar hive and transferring bees from a nuc, a sticky process. We moved to Powys at the beginning of the year so with a bit of land and a more rural lifestyle came the idea of beekeeping. I looked for beehive plans, built my own as soon as we moved in and only after that did I start thinking about filling the hive with bees. This is when I joined Monty Bees and realised that I had chosen the 'alternative' side of beekeeping by building a Kenyan Top Bar hive. It made sense from a carpentry point of view but not necessarily as an aspiring beekeeper.

The hive is a long triangular shaped tube supposed to mimic a hollow log and is sited in the field where it gets the morning sun from the left and the entrance in the middle of its length points south. You grow the brood and the honey stores by adding bars on the sides and moving the dummy board.

When it comes to populating a top bar hive, the recommended method is to install a swarm but I decided to go with a nuc from the training apiary. The transfer method is the same as going from a nuc to a NS hive : take the frames from the nuc one by one and install them in the brood box with a few empty frames around to give bees space to grow. The top bars in the hive are the same length as the top of a NS frame so the frames from the nuc will fit. The only caveat to this being that the box cross section is a triangle and not a rectangle so I used what is known as the 'Chop and Crop' method where you take the frame from the nuc, look for the queen and if the queen is on the frame move here with a queen clip before shaking the bees off the frame into the top bar hive. Attach the frame to a top bar from the hive cutting the wax from the sides and bottom so that you have a rectangular wax comb attached to the top bar. Using the triangular dummy board as a guide cut the bottom corners of the comb to fit the hive profile and repeat for each nuc frame. The nuc box is placed in front of the hive for the first 24 hours. The entrance of the hive is straight behind the nuc box entrance to facilitate orientation.



Making a jig to hold the frame in front of the dummy board when cutting was very helpful. With hindsight, there are a few points that I wish I had known or done beforehand. No books or video can prepare you to how messy your tools will be. I could have done an inspection frame by frame of the nuc box before starting. One of the frames was a super frame and the bottom bar was in the middle of the comb, have a plan but be ready to improvise.

The bees are in the hive now and I saw them continuing their orientation flight today, the next inspection in a few days will tell me if everything went according to plan.

The National Bee Unit - Why Not Train to Become an NBU Inspector?

NBU inspectors visit us and provide an invaluable service identifying diseases and pests and advising how best to manage these situations. They also undergo rigorous training and assessment to ensure they continue to meet high standards. They are employed on a seasonal basis from 1 April to 30 September which is the active inspection season.

What qualifications do you need to join the NBU? Essential is 5 years of beekeeping. As part of the selection process, candidates are required to participate in a photographic assessment of disease and pest recognition, a competency-based interview, which includes a technical beekeeping section and an apiculture skills assessment. Each stage must be passed. New Seasonal Bee Inspectors have a nine month probation period. They attend a two week residential training course then training in the field with a Regional Inspector. After one season they are required to undertake an assessment for the city and Guilds level 2 in Bee Health Management and the Safe use of Veterinary Medicines and this completes the formal training. Each year in the Spring the SBIs meet for a weeks training before the season starts and to pick up all their equipment for the season. There is also an annual assessment to certify that they retain their disease and pest recognition competency.

Rachel Kellaway

Honey cake

Ingredients:

- 5oz butter
- 4oz soft brown sugar
- 6 tablespoons of clear honey
- 1 tablespoon milk
- 2 eggs
- 7 oz self-raising flour

Topical Issue Neonicotinoid pesticides

We have all most likely heard of the lifting of the ban on neonicotinoid pesticides in certain applications such as treating sugar beet seed to prevent a virus that can lead to a smaller harvest. I am also sure that many of our members have petitioned DEFRA to overturn that decision, but in my view we need to do more. I along with other beekeepers have asked for this issue to be raised at our forthcoming WBKA AGM on March 6th and it is on the agenda. I hear that sugar beet farmers are saying its only applied as a seed treatment, sugar beet is harvested before it flowers so we are taking the right steps to protect the environment. But then I hear another voice maybe we could use it as a treatment on oil seed rape seed, oh yes that does flower, but it will be all right, and then you hear of a potato virus and the slippery slope has begun. I can hear some of our beekeepers also say, 'so well it doesn't affect me all that farming is in the East of England my bees are in rural Wales where large scale arable crops just can't happen so it not on my patch so why get concerned, I'll just get that spray out to treat that pesky aphid problem in the greenhouse'.

Quite rightly our government has banned the use of neonicotinoids since 2018 as it has been proven to be so detrimental to our foraging insects. Unfortunately, it is beginning to back track under immense pressure from certain farming lobbies and Agri businesses. I call for WBKA and our voices to be heard to highlight this issue, not only to support our colleagues over the border by lobbying as a group, but also to inform our members of this different threat to pollinator welfare.

Maia Wells

Heat the butter, sugar, honey and milk slowly in a saucepan, stirring all the time until the butter has melted. Remove the pan from the heat and allow the contents to cool to blood temperature. Gradually beat in the eggs. Sieve and add the flour and mix until smooth
Pour the mixture (its very sloppy at this stage) into a greased and lined 7" cake tin.

Bake for about an hour at 180 degrees C (350 F) until risen and firm to the touch

Summer Flowering Plants for Pollinators

As I write this (late May), the weather is very unsummer-like, and the season so far, has been a difficult one for our bees. Most of us have had to continue feeding much later than we normally would, and the cold and wet weather has delayed the development of many flowering plants. After a cold but dry April, we went into a cold and wet May, so lots of plants are about two weeks behind their normal stage of development for this time of year.

But, nature being what it is, everything should eventually flower and provide a much needed source of nectar and pollen. So for the summer months, we are spoilt for choice, and I will mention a few of the ore easily grown species, some of which you may already have in your garden.

Achillea filipendula 'Cloth of Gold' (yarrow) is an imposing perennial plant with large flattened heads. It will grow to about 1.5 metres



In the same yarrow family, but a different sub species, is *Achillea millefolium* 'Cerise Queen', a shorter (60cms) more open plant, but with the same flattened heads much loved by pollinating insects.



The allium family offers a wide range of bulbs of different heights and appearances. Some, particularly the smaller varieties will multiply and spread if they like your soil - you have been warned! Two worth trying are *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation' growing to about 90 cms and the rather larger A. 'Globe Master' pictured here.



Alliums, as members of the onion family, prefer a dry sunny position. They can be bought as bulbs to be planted in the autumn, or as potted plants in the spring and summer. If you let any of your onions go to seed, the bees will appreciate those too.



One of the UK's favourite garden plants is the hardy geranium, not to be confused with the bedding geraniums; these come in a range of varieties that can give you colour and interest over many months. They are largely trouble free, and with their simple open flowers, attract many pollinators.



Good ones to try are *Geranium renardii*, with unusual foliage, and growing to about 35 cms. *Geranium 'Dilys'* will tolerate poorly drained soil and semi-shade, unlike many others in this group. *Geranium 'Patricia'*, pictured is widely available and flowers on for months.

Finally, we turn to a well loved annual that can create a riot of colour throughout the summer months. Easy to grow, with edible flowers, and leaves, even the seeds are said to offer a good alternative to capers when pickled. The flowers come in a range of creams, yellows, oranges, reds and burgundy, and prefer dry sunny conditions.



There are lots more bee and pollinator friendly plants to be found in your local garden centre, keep an eye out for this logo on labels and seed packets; and remember that wild flowers will be very welcome, so try to leave some of the 'weeds' in a corner to help feed the bees.

Cath Boswell

Treatment Free Beekeeping by David Heaf - A Review

It comes as no surprise that Bees for Development described this book as “a seminal work and essential reading for both beekeepers and researchers”, and that Thorne's Beekeeper's News rated it 5/5 on its recent release. This is a book that not only expresses the sentiment for treatment-free beekeeping, but crucially goes to great lengths to make the case in a highly scientific, research-based way that the treatment-free approach is the most likely way to ensure our bee's healthy future.

Dr David Heaf is a world expert on the 'People's Hive' of Abbé Émile Warré, a design he chose after considering the most conducive environment in which husbanded bees could thrive in the climate and ecology of his home area of Gwynedd in North Wales. He manages up to eight apiaries and his own bees have been kept



completely chemical-treatment free for ten years. He takes the unequivocal position that “all chemicals aimed at poisoning the target organism, most commonly varroa, circumvent natural selection, thereby postponing the co-adaptation of the honey bee”. Second to this he refers to the “dozens of papers” which examine the various degrees in which synthetic and organic miticides can have wide-ranging effects on bee health and behaviour.

As in his first book *The Bee-friendly Beekeeper*, David devotes a chapter to ethical considerations. This includes recognising the tension that sometimes exists between beekeepers who favour chemical treatment and those who don't. For example, some

'treaters' have accused 'non-treaters' of creating 'mite-bombs' i.e. colonies that if weakened will be robbed by healthier bees that will carry infection back to their treated nests (though this somewhat undermines belief in the efficacy of the treatments being applied in them). On the other hand, non-treaters will see their efforts to open-mate strong, locally well-adapted bees as being undermined by their queens mating with drones with inferior genes from colonies that might not exist without chemical bolstering. A dilemma indeed. Not so, David happily concludes, in the case of the 'Gwynedd Experience'. For several years, two thirds of bee colonies went untreated and the majority remain so to this day. For five years, between 2010 and 2015, Shân and Clive Hudson of Meirionydd Beekeeping Association diligently recorded winter losses amongst both treated and untreated colonies in their area, a total of over 1,500 colony winters. The statistically significant difference of the results indicated, surprisingly, no reduction in winter losses was gained by the treated colonies in fact, within the study group, the figures could actually indicate a comparatively detrimental effect to chemical treatment. David expands the theme by looking at several other treatment-free studies in both Europe and America, considers biotechnical methods used against varroa, and other ways of minimising colony loss by giving consideration to areas such as genetics, hive type, and colony management.

Demonstrating his typical disdain for overly-dogmatic approaches David questions even his own book's title. Research has demonstrated how our honeybees are adapting to varroa by investigating potentially infected cells in their hives, uncapping and then re-capping them, and removing any infected material in the process. Therefore, he says, even completely wild colonies that are surviving varroa aren't treatment free, it's just that the treatments there are being administered not by humans - but by the bees themselves!

Mal Shears, Member for Alternative Beekeeping

Bees in the news

Making honey without bees and milk without cows

This eye-catching title appeared on BBC News on March 23rd and reported on vegan Darko Mandich's idea to create honey without the use of bees. The company, MeliBio, uses micro-organisms in a laboratory to convert simple sugars like glucose and fructose into blocks of honey. Not only does this process allow vegans to potentially enjoy "honey", Mandich also claims it has a benefit to the environment as commercial beekeeping across the world competes with wild and native bee species. The first bio-identical honey should be available by the end of 2021 but happily we are unlikely to see jars of the stuff for sale in the local supermarket. It will be used as an ingredient for products such as drinks, cosmetics and pharmacological items.

"Liquid gold: beekeeping defying Yemen war to produce the best honey".

If some of us think beekeeping in wet Wales has its challenges, imagine beekeeping in a war-torn country like Yemen! This article in The Guardian describes the problems Yemeni beekeepers face: roadblocks and fuel shortages making it difficult to move bees to forage and access water, the unregulated use of pesticides by farmers, and the risk of injury or death from local fighting and unmarked landmines. Understandably, beekeepers prefer to move their hives at night when the bees are all in the hives, but nocturnal movement is seen as suspicious, and beekeepers can be targeted by drones and airstrikes.

There are approximately 100,000 beekeepers in Yemen, working small scale to produce in total about 1,580 tonnes of honey, of which 840 tonnes is exported. Honey from the sidr tree is prized and can sell for up to £370 per kg in nearby Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates. Sidr honey is pale and has a "fiery, almost bitter after-taste" and is seen as a symbol of perseverance (not surprising, considering the environment beekeepers work in to harvest it! Against the backdrop of so much adversity, one beekeeper describes bees and honey as "a blessing from God").

Bees and Art

I bet no-one has thought of making their honey into an artwork! An article titled “Hive talkin’: the buzz about honey” which appeared in the Financial Times in February describes an installation planned for the Talbot Rice gallery in Edinburgh. Artist and beekeeper Tonya McMullen has created a virtual beehive which has no bees but every frame has a petri dish attached, containing the different honeys collected from beekeepers around Edinburgh. The work illustrates the amazing diversity of colours and tastes of the honeys harvested from a relatively small area. Each sample is accompanied by an analysis of the pollen count and tasting notes. For example, one sample is described as tasting like “apple with mango zest”, rather like wine descriptions. As with wines, the article also includes recommendations for the use of honeys in certain dishes, such as using fermented honey in a cod-cheek dish or drizzling another type over courgette and goat’s cheese flatbread pizza.

Bees and Landmines

Bees are wonderful creatures and a report in BBC news at the end of March illustrated yet another amazing attribute of the honeybee. Bees can identify the scent of explosives and this talent is being used to locate landmines buried in the 1990s during the Balkan wars. There are still an estimated 80,000 landmines hidden in Bosnia and Herzegovina and more than 30,000 in Croatia. The bees are “trained” by getting them to associate the smell of TNT with sugar solution. When out flying over an area suspected to contain landmines, the bees cluster in places where these devices are buried, looking for food. Aerial drones (not male bees!) moving systematically across the area record where the bees are flying. This information is analysed to produce a map of potential landmine sites. So far, the project has been trialled in areas containing deactivated mines, with promising results. In the future, the honeybee may save the lives of the people living in these dangerous environments and make the job of those who search for and remove landmines easier and safer.

Jill Hills

Keirie Vernon reviews 'Songhive'

This wonderful collection of songs is all about bees and bee lore in the British Isles, some are quite ancient and some new. The Songhive project was put together by Rowan Piggot in order to raise awareness of the current plight of our native bees. You probably know this already but according to folklore it's very important to tell your bees all your news, worries and concerns. In return they'll give honey. One of my favourite tracks on the CD is "The Bee Boys Song" by Rudyard Kipling below. To see more on the project you can visit the website www.songhive.co.uk

BEES! BEES! Hark to your bees!

*"Hide from your neighbours as much as you please,
But all that has happened, to us you must tell,
Or else we will give you no honey to sell!"*

*A maiden in her glory,
Upon her wedding-day,
Must tell her Bees the story,
Or else they'll fly away.
Fly away - die away -
Dwindle down and leave you!
But if you don't deceive your Bees,
Your Bees will not deceive you.
Marriage, birth or buryin',
News across the seas,
All you're sad or merry in,
You must tell the Bees.
Tell 'em coming in an' out,
Where the Fanners fan,
'Cause the Bees are just about
As curious as a man!
Don't you wait where the trees are,
When the lightnings play,
Nor don't you hate where Bees are,
Or else they'll pine away.
Pine away - dwine away -
Anything to leave you!
But if you never grieve your Bees,
Your Bees'll never grieve you.*



Don't speak too soon... Asian hornets

After writing in the spring issue of The BeeHolder that the Channel Islands had reported a marked reduction in the numbers of Asian Hornets found on the islands, recent news suggests they spoke too soon! On June 9th, the first nest in 18 months was found in Guernsey. It was the size of a golf ball situated about 7ft from the ground and consisted of 11 cells containing 5 eggs so was very new. 9 hornets have been trapped in Sark with another 10 sightings reported. 63 queens have already been caught in Jersey and 5 nests destroyed. Islanders are being encouraged to search garden sheds and garages for nests. The public awareness campaign about the Asian Hornet has been very successful in the Channel Islands with 38 of the 63 queens found in Jersey being found by members of the public. A more comprehensive trapping system is now in place following the discovery of 69 queens in 2019 so Asian Hornet co-ordinators are confident these new discoveries are not over-wintered queens but brought in recently from France on a strong Easterly wind.

Interestingly, a single Asian Hornet "alive but dying" in a private dwelling was found in Ireland just north of Dublin. No further sightings have been found.

Rachel Kellaway is our Asian Hornet Action Co-ordinator on 07787 160930. Ideally take a photo of a suspected Asian Hornet and send it to Rachel or alrtnonnative@ceh.ac.uk More information can be found on BeeBase.

Tanging Really Works

After reading the May issue of BeeCraft about Tanging Bees, little did I know that I was about to try it. Seeing a very large swarm taking off from one of our hives, I grabbed my tin box and started Tanging it very loudly. To my surprise the bees came back down and settled on the hedge. I just kept on going until they formed a cluster. I then put a skep over them and gently smoked them up. Pleased to say they are rehomed, settled and working, give it ago nothing to lose but a large swarm of Bees.

Glyn Morris

Brian Norris - In The Frame

When you are young some first impressions stay with you for life. Brian Norris remembers watching with his three brothers as beekeepers approached the swarm that had settled on a forsythia bush close to the front window. They collected the swarm and Brian thought 'how clever'. It was an impression that stayed with him but he didn't encounter bees again until he and Jenny were settled in the Thames village of Egham in Berkshire when he met a man who had been given four hives.

Looking back it wasn't the best introduction to beekeeping, in fact it was a serious deterrent because the man was terrified of bees. He talked so much about the number of times he had been stung that Brian's interest in bees might have ended there but for a happy chance. The speaker at their local gardening club was ill and so she sent her husband to give a slide presentation of his hobby and his hobby was beekeeping.

He visited the beekeeper, who kept two hives in quite a small garden and that was enough for Brian to buy the last of the WBC hives from his friend who had wisely decided to sell the hives. It was in pretty terrible condition but he was helped by two mentors, one of whom, Morris Culthorpe was a biology lecturer at Egham's Royal Holloway College. Like many new beekeepers he was thirsty for knowledge, reading everything that he could and learning from experience. His initial hive grew to ten and Brian reckons that the Thames valley at that time was one of the best places for honey.

With his hives producing 60 lb of honey each every season Brian thought seriously about becoming a commercial beekeeper. He and Jenny with their 9 year old daughter had begun to look at the west country in earnest when Brian's uncle, who lived in mid-Wales sent him details of a cottage close to his home and that is how they came to Little Garth. The family moved in July 1981 and in August Brian attended his first meeting of Montgomeryshire Beekeepers. It was a practical session in honey extraction and all the members who had

brought along honey were chatting about how brilliant the year had been with an average of 34 lbs of honey per hive.

Mid-wales seemed very far from the Thames valley at that point and the dream of expanding to become a commercial beekeeper was rapidly fading. Yet with a workshop, plans and the necessary equipment Brian had already begun to make national hives out of pine rather than expensive western red cedar favoured by the manufacturers. It was the beginning of a new business and in one of those serendipitous moments, Phil Jennings gave up his agency selling bee equipment and Brian took over.



Brian inspecting a hive at the Gregynog apiary with Jill and Chris

Go to any copy of Beeholder and you will see Brian's advertisement for hives and equipment but he is first and foremost a beekeeper. His own hives are set a little apart from the nectar and pollen rich garden, and the bees are dark. Talking of bees Brian remembers reading about our native black bee back in the 1970s and thinking that they were a good idea. The only bees he has ever bought was a colony of Brisith black bees from an Irish beekeeper that he met at a welsh convention in 1990. They were very dark in colour, friendly and, he added with a grin, they swarmed like mad but then you can't have everything. Brian is a member of the apiary team and he talked about the necessity of managing bees. He sees nature as cruel and wasteful so if you want your bees to thrive you have to manage them.

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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 input or issues contact David at webadmin@montybees.org.uk