



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS
ASSOCIATION**

The BeeHolder



Early Spring Foragers

Editorial

Winter is often a time of reflection and this issue looks back at the apiary year and our training programmes, the shows we attended and talks at Plas Dolerw.

Sian Jones has written comprehensively answering your questions on Bee Diseases Insurance.

Please read the report on honey authenticity and sign the petition to prompt the government to act on this scandal.

If you are a knitter then do knit these cute little bees for World Bee Day on 20th May.

Snowdrops and crocus are the first flowers and you can read why they should be in all our gardens before turning to Jill Hill's excellent round up of news on all things bee,

Finally, Chris May is in the frame and with 50 years experience as a commercial bee farmer, its fascinating reading.

Carolle

www.montybees.org.uk

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2022 Review of Our Apiary at Gregynog

As we move towards the end of another year, it is good to take time and review on how the year has passed at the apiary. This year has been more of a challenge than recent years!

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 keen new bee keepers.

The team were very pleased in March, when upon their first inspections that all 11 colonies had successfully come through the winter months, this inspection coincided with the first beginners practical session.

The apiary year had started well, despite disappointing weather, which had resulted in a number of the weekly Sunday sessions being cancelled. During June apiary team members, Joy, Jill, Simon, Paul and Mark were successful in gaining their WBKA Basic Assessment qualification.

As we moved into the summer we had high hopes for a similar bumper honey harvest as in 2021. However our hopes were dashed when on the 3rd July, during one of our weekly Sunday sessions Jill and Simon (this year's new apiary team members) spotted some dodgy looking unsealed lava in one of the nuc boxes. We immediately shut-down the apiary and contacted Paul Aslin our local SBI. At the time of this discovery the apiary had expanded to consist of 14 colonies in National hives, one colony in a nuc box, and two colonies in a Warre and Kenyan Top Bar Hives. Paul Aslin and his colleague Liz Childerley attended the apiary on the Tuesday, their inspections were going well until the very last hive, when the Lateral Flow Device (LFD) showed positive for European Foul Brood (EFB). The apiary was placed on a formal standstill, no movement off-site of any items and the apiary team instructed to wash suits on a high temperature wash and to be vigilant of their own apiary. The shook swarm procedure was scheduled for the

following week, this was to be undertaken by Paul and Liz with the support of a number of the apiary team. Due to the large number of colonies at the apiary it was quite a task to purchase and make up the new brood frames, again the support of the apiary team ensured that this was achieved on time. The day of the shook swarm required the team to be highly organised, Jill Hill had created an overall plan and had worked closely with the Gregynog Management team, as there was requirement for us to burn a large number of items in a pit close to the apiary. Under her supervision we all had defined roles. The day started at 10:00 and finished at 16:45 hours; a long and tiring day.



Everything out of the bee shed for cleaning and sterilising

The procedure following the initial shook swarm is that the apiary remained in lock-down for a further six weeks, where upon it will be re-inspected. Following the shook swarms two hives absconded despite queen excluders being inserted, one hive had a swarm under it; the swarm was put back in the hive. Also the Kenyan Top Bar hive was found to have bees outside of it which again were recovered. Following the six week period, the apiary was again inspected, no EFB was detected so the standstill notice was retracted. However it wasn't all good news as the apiary had not responded well to the shook swarm process, a number of the hives were struggling either queen-less, or with small colonies or little food stores. Prior to the EFB outbreak we had seventeen colonies, this reduced to nine colonies and further reduced to six colonies to enter the winter months. The impact of the EFB outbreak also had a detrimental affect on this years training sessions from July onwards, and unfortunately no honey was harvested from the apiary.

The apiary enters the winter period with six colonies housed with national hives. Unfortunately the Warre hive and Kenyan Top Bar Hive colonies did not survive. During the autumn we concentrated on ensuring that those six colonies were well fed. Varroa treatment has been applied, with an additional treatment of oxalic acid applied during January.

Finally some maintenance work is to be undertaken during January and February, with slabs being put in place to stand the hives upon. The floor of the apiary shed also requires some strengthening.

Hoping for a smoother 2023 bee keeping season.

Mark Swain

A.G.M. 2023

In her welcome address MBKA Chair, Joy Sisley reported on the apiary year which you can read about in Mark Swain's summary on the preceding pages. Joy moved on to describe an exciting year of training where, apart from the beginners, improvers and intermediate courses, Rachel Kellaway introduced the Miller method of queen rearing. Joy congratulated the members who had passed the BBKA Basic Assessment. thanked Lynfa Davies, who spent two whole days doing the assessments at the Association Apiary in Gregynog, and Rachel Kellaway and Simon Anderson for providing support in the apiary on the day. There had been a remarkable thirst for learning, encouraged by Rachel Kellaway, who passed the BBKA modules 3 & 6.



Six members signed up for the BBKA module 1 Honey Bee Management and formed a study group to work through the syllabus. Whilst several members attended the Honey Bee Health course run by Marin Anastanov and Lynfa Davies at Plas Dolerw in November and will be taking the assessment this year. Another fascinating day was spent staring down microscopes to learn something about honey bee anatomy run as a day course at Plas Dolerw by Lynfa Davies.

Anne Wren, who had spent several years organising the MBKA stand at village shows and other events was thanked and her legacy of display materials and information has been passed to Jill McAloon whose report on last year's events can be read on page 14. Mal Shears, the Alternative Beekeeping Committee Representative, displayed the Warre and Kenyan Hives at shows together with the Bee House which had drawn a great deal of interest.

The monthly programme of talks at Plas Dolerw had been a great success. Carolle Doyle, kicked off the season with a talk about Bee Friendly flowering plants. Members were privileged to welcome Lynfa Davies, Master Beekeeper twice to talk about interpreting bee behaviour and bee nutrition, and at the beginning of January a panel of beekeepers with the combined wisdom of 90 years of beekeeping, answered questions. After concluding by wishing everyone a happy and productive summer with their bees Joy thanked all those who worked so hard for the Association.

The Committee was re-elected.

MBKA President, David Morris presented Secretary, Jill Hill with the Roy Norris Legacy Award in recognition of her outstanding contribution to the work of the Association and its members.



Bee Diseases Insurance - Your Questions Answered

What does Bee Diseases Insurance Cover? Bee Diseases Insurance Ltd compensates insured beekeepers for equipment losses where their bees are destroyed or treated under the Bees Act 1980, The Bee Diseases and Pests Control (England) Order 2006 and The Bee Diseases and Pests Control (Wales) Order 2006, or any similar order in force at the time, for notifiable diseases, currently European Foul Brood (EFB) and American Foul Brood (AFB) by a Bee Inspector appointed by the Food and Environment Research Agency (FERA). Bee Diseases Insurance does not cover colony losses for other reasons such as starvation, non-notifiable disease, wasp attacks or damage to hives by bad weather or livestock. BDI is independent, but works closely with WBKA, BBKA and the National Bee Unit Bee Inspection Service. The NBU Bee Inspectors diagnose and destroy or treat colonies and will certify the losses.

What is the 40 day rule? This was introduced to protect all beekeepers and to stop beekeepers seeking cover only when they discovered they had Foul Brood. All subscriptions and premiums that are paid before 31 March will take effect immediately. Any subscriptions paid after 31st March, plus any additional premium “top up” paid after 31 March will not enjoy cover for 40 days following payment to the local BKA. It is therefore sensible for the beekeeper to pay on time and allow for any expected increase in the numbers of colonies they may have during the season, which might be due to swarm control, collecting swarms or queen rearing.

How many colonies should I cover? All colonies owned by a beekeeper must be covered; otherwise none are, even if only one colony is destroyed. Many beekeepers underestimate the numbers of colonies they might have during the active season, so BDI introduced a banding scheme to help ensure that beekeepers who collect swarms, make artificial swarms or nuclei during the season do not find themselves with inadequate cover. If, for example, you normally run

ten colonies but have the equipment and facilities to have more, you should consider paying the premium for the next band. The important thing when considering how many to cover is to make an accurate count of the starting number of colonies and then to add the plans, hopes or expectations of increase in the coming season.

Are Apideas or other mini-nucs covered? Apideas are not included in the compensation rates and they do not therefore have to be counted as a colony. No compensation is payable so no premiums are required to be paid in respect of mini-nucs.

Should a Nucleus Box be counted? Yes. Any single colony containing standard frames, which are included in the compensation list, should be included. Each nucleus, whatever the size counts as one colony.

Are Top Bar Hives & Warre hive frames covered? Any frames destroyed as a result of a notifiable disease are covered in the normal way.

If I take swarms during the year will they be included? If the swarm is collected with the intention of keeping and hiving it, then obviously it becomes part of your property and is counted as one colony. You must allow for this possible increase when calculating your dues. If, as often happens, you collect a swarm and before it is hived, pass it on to another member who is short of bees, it is the responsibility of the new owner to cover them.

Should all bees on a communal site be covered? All colonies on a communal site must be covered with BDI taken out by the respective owners, otherwise none are covered. A communal site is a permanent or temporary apiary site, which is shared by two or more beekeepers. BDI consider that apiary sites on the opposite side of the same field are separate apiaries but if in the same garden would be communal, however each case must be considered on its merits. If in doubt, it is best to ensure that each beekeeper has cover and if not, then do not use the site.

Please contact the Membership Secretary at membership@montybees.org.uk if you have any other questions or see the BDI website here <https://www.beediseasesinsurance.co.uk/>

Sian Jones

2022 - Return of the Shows

And relax! That was the collective feeling of all who helped man the Monty Bees stand at the Guilsfield and Berriew Shows and the Newtown Food Festival. All three events took place in a period of less than a month so we were pretty busy.

Guilsfield on 11th August was the first show and what a hot day it was. Although the number of visitors to the show was down on previous years, there was plenty of interest in beekeeping, especially 'alternative beekeeping' and we received a number of enquiries about membership following the show.



Berriew was next on 27th August. What a time to find out that the company who supplied one of our domes had sent the wrong poles. Two domes became one, but on such a beautiful day it didn't matter at all. The stand was really busy and customers were buying honey and bee products right up until 5.00 p.m. We provided a child's bee suit and gloves which was a great hit with the children. There were a lot of parents taking a lot of photos! Although the suit wasn't quite one size fits all the children didn't seem to mind.



And on to the two day Food Festival at Newtown the following weekend. Despite not having an allocated space for our two domes, this was our most successful event. After some negotiations on arrival at the show we secured an excellent pitch and were very busy, especially on the Saturday. We even had our picture in the local paper! The profile of people at the show was very different to those earlier. There was a lot of interest in beekeeping but many more people were interested in buying our products than at Berriew or Guilsfield. I am happy to say we returned with very little stock and a full cash box.

I cannot thank all the volunteers enough. There was a lot of hard work and a lot of laughter too.

Monty Bees will be attending all three shows again next year, as well as organising an event in collaboration with Gregynog Hall on 20th May to mark World Bee Day 2023. Is it too soon to ask for volunteers?

Jill McAloon



The Kenyan (top bar) and Warre hives were displayed at the shows together with information about approaches to 'natural' beekeeping, which generated a lot of interest. Pictured here are a skep and the Beehouse, designed by Bees for Development. It provides the right sized cavity for a honey bee colony to build its nest and live naturally. It replicates a hollow tree and simply provides a nesting space for honey bees.

<https://www.beesfordevelopment.org/article/the-bee-house/>

Honey Authenticity: a new petition for 2023

Rachel Kellaway reports one of the most shocking things she heard at the WBKA convention when she listened to Lynne Ingram’s talk on honey fraud, was the practice of harvesting immature honey in China. They say it’s the ‘modern’ method of beekeeping. Beekeepers follow nectar flows from south to north through China harvesting immature honey on a daily basis. Barrels are then sent to huge processing plants where it is pasteurized using high tech ultrasound equipment, dehumidified and ultra-filtered to separate pollens, aromas and pigments.

Responding to concerns, the Honey Authenticity Project commissioned research into the composition and authenticity of own-brand honey from UK supermarkets in 2018 and 2019. The tests found evidence to suggest adulteration in every sample tested.

To meet demand, around 90% of the honey we eat in the UK is imported. There is legitimate concern among UK beekeepers and honey producers about honey imports from countries where honey may be adulterated on an industrial scale. This can significantly impact the perceived value of honey in the consumer’s eye and result in unfair economic competition against UK producers. The BBKA campaigning to make labelling with full country of origin mandatory to enable consumers to choose honey from sources where adulteration is less likely.



Joy Sisley

Please sign the BBKA petition. At 100,000 signatures, this petition will be considered for debate in Parliament.

To sign, go to:

<https://petition.parliament.uk/petitions/624402/signatures/new>

Knit a bee for World Bee Day 2023

MBKA's Events organiser Jill McAloon has taken up the challenge to knit 100 of these little woolly creatures in time for World Bee Day 2023. They will be on show at our event at Gregynog Hall on 20th May to celebrate the day and to raise awareness about bees and their sustainability. She needs your help. Some members of the committee or their partners have already made a start. The pattern is provided courtesy of Bee Craft magazine and Barbara Rickitt. It will also be available on our website with with step by step illustrations.

To produce a knitted bee approximately 9cm long (3.5in)

Materials

- 1 ball of yellow wool (double knitting)
- 1 ball black wool (double knitting)
- Pair of 3.75mm needles (or size 10)
- Tapestry needle
- Short length of red wool
- Pair of plastic eyes or pearl buttons
- Scrap of white fine net - or washing scrunchie
- Stuffing



Body and head (stocking stitch)

Using black wool, cast on eight stitches Row 1: (Wrong side): Purl Row 2: [Increase 1] eight times. (16 stitches) Row 3: Purl Row 4: [Increase 1] 16 times. (32 stitches) Work six rows in stocking stitch. Break off black wool, join in yellow wool. Work four rows in stocking stitch. Break off yellow wool, join in black wool. Work four rows in stocking stitch. Break off black wool, join in yellow wool. Work four rows in stocking stitch. Break off yellow wool, join in black wool. Work three rows in stocking stitch. Row 26: [K2 tog] 16 times (16 stitches) Row 27: [P2 tog] eight times (eight stitches) Row 28: [K2 tog] four times (four stitches) Break off yarn and thread through stitches on needle. Draw tight and secure the end.

Making up

For body and head, partially sew up the side seam using mattress stitch or backstitch. Insert stuffing and complete the seam. Attach the eyes or buttons. Using the red wool, embroider the mouth using backstitch. For the wings, cut a rounded rectangle approx. 3x7cm. Pinch and gather and stitch to the back of the bee. Stitch a loop of wool to hang the bee.

Snowdrops

On a mild and sunny day in mid-February the orchard is loud with the buzz of bees because the drifts of white that lie between the trees aren't the remnants of a snowstorm but thousands upon thousands of *Galanthus nivalis*. To you and me these are our much loved snowdrops and although they can't claim to be true natives these great survivors broke out of our gardens centuries ago so that now they are 'naturalised' appearing in fat clumps beneath roadside hedges and drifting down grassy banks.



Theirs is perhaps the earliest offering of both nectar and pollen although the little purple crocus, *Crocus thommasinianus* runs the snowdrops a close second. Affectionately known as 'Tommies' these natives of Eastern Europe are the earliest crocus to flower some weeks ahead of the bigger and bolder Dutch crocus.

Both snowdrops and Tommies do well and will multiply in grass although any lawn with these early bulbs cannot then be cut until the leaves have died down for they feed next year's bulbs. If your lawn is sacrosanct then there is always space beneath shrubs, in the borders, beneath trees and along a hedgerow. This is where I grow 'S. Arnott' and 'Brenda Troyle' that stand head and shoulders above the little *G. nivalis*. Both are cultivars of *G. plicatus* which is the largest of the snowdrops being brought back by soldiers returning from the Crimean War. Nurserymen got hold of this unlikely souvenir of cruel war crossing *G. plicatus* with *G. nivalis* to produce both Sam and Brenda.

Does this make me a Galanthophile? I doubt it because a true snowdrop lover will examine each flower minutely noticing subtle differences in form and to be brutally honest I cannot tell Brenda from Sam. Not all differences are subtle and some are so enchanting that they would turn anyone into a Galanthophile in an instant. Pictured here is one of the most delightful of its tribe, the tribe being *G. elwesii* and the tribal member being 'Grumpy'. How I would love to own this little snowdrop with its big eyes and downturned mouth but my pocket would be lighter by £25 for a single bulb and so I am content with *G. nivalis* and I dare say the bees don't care for all they want is snowdrops by the thousand.



The way to accomplish this is to either buy or beg a great clump of snowdrops right now when they are 'in the green' which simply means that although they have finished flowering they are still in full growth. The clump can then be divided and it is surprising how many there will be. These can then be planted either individually or in threes where they will form big clumps of their own in a surprisingly short time. They will also set seed too for as I wrote earlier, these small unassuming flowers are one of the world's great survivors.

As an added note of encouragement, I am willing to give a clump to anyone who wants to begin this journey into galanthophilia. Your bees will love you for it. For those interested I live in Trefnanney near Meifod so just e-mail me carolledoyle@aol.com and we can arrange a visit.

Carolle Doyle

Bees in the News

AFB vaccination for honey bees

The US Dept of Agriculture has granted a conditional licence for a vaccine against American Foulbrood. Produced by Dalan Animal Health, partnered with the University of Georgia, it will initially just be available to commercial beekeepers. The article states that in some areas of the US, the disease has been found in 25% of colonies. However, identification and management of the disease appears to be the responsibility of the individual beekeeper in the US, without a service like we enjoy from our seasonal bee inspectors.

Before you have visions of sticking a needle into each individual bee in your colonies, apparently the vaccine works by incorporating inactive causative bacteria *Paenibacillus* larvae into the candy fed to the queen. Some of the vaccine ends up in her ovaries which ultimately gives immunity to the bee larvae developed from her eggs. If the vaccine is successful, the company hopes it could lead to vaccines for other diseases such as European Foulbrood.

The search for a test to diagnose stress in honeybees

Researchers at Bucknell University in Philadelphia are trying to identify chemical indicators of stress in honeybee brains. The goal is to then develop a cheap and simple test which can diagnose when a colony is under stress at an early stage before it shows signs and symptoms. The underlying cause can be addressed before it harms the colony. The driver for this work has been Colony Collapse Disorder which first hit the headlines in the USA in 2006 and continues to be a significant issue there.

Surveys by the Bee Informed Partnership show that beekeepers lose between 30 and 50% of their colonies annually. As a consequence of these losses, as well as rising fuel costs and the impact of Covid, farmers are now paying \$100 dollars per hive, compared to \$50 dollars a decade ago, when hiring hives to pollinate crops. Honeybees are big business, contributing at least \$15 billion dollars annually to the US economy.

Was a single mated Asian Hornet queen responsible for the huge numbers now found across mainland Europe?

The Asian Hornet is believed to have been introduced into France from China in 2004. Since then, it has spread and become well-established across mainland Europe and the Channel Islands. Relatively few nests and insects have been found in the UK so far, but climate change may alter this in the future.

A single hornet, alive but dying, was discovered in Dublin in April 2021, origin unknown. It was sent to the National Museum of Ireland where genetic analysis was performed, comparing it with hornets found in several European countries. Data from 3 genetic markers showed that the hornets in Europe are all related and probably originated from a single mated queen.

The bad news, of course, is this research shows how easy it appears to be for a single insect to colonise a novel and extensive area, given favourable environment and circumstances. However, the good news is that the close relatedness of Asian Hornets in Europe may make it easier to develop a way of eradicating them based on biological control methods.

Bentley bees

The headquarters of the Bentley car manufacturers at Crewe are the proud owners of 10 colonies of honeybees. The apiary is sited in the grounds as one of Bentley's initiatives to improve the local environment along with birdhouses, hedgehog boxes and planting 100 trees and 5,000 daffodil bulbs.

The bees had a good season last year producing a bumper crop of 1,000 jars of honey. These are given as gifts to important visitors to Bentley HQ so next time you're in there buying a car, you may get a jar!

Jill Hill

Chris May - In The Frame

The WBC hive that stands as a sentinel to mark the way to Chris May's home just outside Llanfyllin is a memento of times long past but had I driven further on down the Tanat valley last summer I would have noted Chris's 22 commercial hives. It was, he says, a very good year where the flow of nectar from hawthorn, which is Chris's quintessential honey, was the beginning of what amounted to a short but bountiful season and the best for several years. Each hive had averaged between 60 and 80 lbs of honey in this, Chris May's final season for he has just hung up his beekeeper's veil after 50 years.

It began simply enough in 1970 when Chris took up a teaching position in Derbyshire and on looking through the outbuildings came across two old WBC hives. They were due to be burnt which seemed a shame and prompted Chris to ask for them as he rather liked the idea of beekeeping. The hives opened up a whole new world and on joining the Burton-on-Trent Beekeepers Association he was lucky to find a mentor in Tom Boulter, a retired miner and Ministry of Agriculture Bee Inspector. Chris says that he was 'bitten by the bug' as he read a great many books, visited 'open hives' and joined Tom as a Bee Inspector.

Chris also increased the number of WBC hives to eight but as a skilled woodworker and with a good source of prime pine timber he began making Commercial hives whose larger 10 x 16 frames suited his prolific bees giving the queen a bigger brood box and consequently there was also a good deal of honey in the brood frames. In the first three years his stocks increased to 20 hives and by the late 1970s these had grown exponentially to 90 hives spread over eight apiaries sited on horticultural nurseries and farms with stock proof fields

The years were now marked by particular crops as Chris loaded the hives onto his trailer and drove them to the bean fields in the spring and North Derbyshire's heather moors in the summer. The thixotropic nature of heather honey made it very hard work but by now Chris had a big, purpose built shed with a warming cabinet, an electric uncapping knife and a galvanised heather press that was more akin to apple pressing than honey extraction.

Not everything was perfect, chemical spraying of the bean fields and bracken over the moorland did kill some bees because things do go wrong sometimes, life is like that. Even so Chris was awash with honey. He joined the Bee Farmers Association one advantage of which was honey jars at cost. Honey by the ton is all very well but you need an outlet and providentially the Chatsworth Estate, which was a popular place for visitors, opened a farm shop in 1977. Chris's jars of creamed and clear honey together with pure heather honey comb, the 'bees knees' of all honeys took their place on the shelves.



There are, of course, other passions and pursuits. Chris and his partner were passionate gardeners and very enthusiastic carriage drivers over many years and in 1997 everything came together when they moved to a farm in Ceredigion with a three acre arboretum. They brought just 25 hives to their new home but, as Chris says, you never stop learning about bees and one of the joys is handing on knowledge which, in this case, took the form of their lovely collection of bee books which are now with the Aberystwyth beekeepers.

It was a parting gift for eight years ago they came to the hill above Llanfyllin. If you visit the Derwen Farm Shop you will still find jars of Welsh Wildflower Honey bearing the name C.D. May but the last harvest has been made. If this is a big emotional wrench and, indeed it is, there is literally a weight off Chris's shoulders for he no longer must harvest honey by the ton.

Carolle Doyle

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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
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