Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association

The BeeHolder

Autumn/Winter 2024

Ethiopa Mizan Log Hive

Editorial

In this issue you will meet the Apiary Team, those dedicated members who are responsible for the running of our apiary at Gregynog. Find out what they have been up to as well in Rachel Kellaway's apiary report

'Bees through the winter' will give you a great check list to tick off and talking of that season, there are some interesting infra-red images of how bees cluster within the hive.

Our winter talks began with Chris Keywood, one of three project managers for the charity 'Bees for Development' inspiring us all through his talk. I certainly came away with a bounce in my step and I hope this will give you a taste of this small charity with a very big idea.

If you didn't catch our shows then you can see what we were up to as Jill McAloon takes you through the summer with her words and pictures. Thinking of summer now is the time to plant roses for next year,

Jill Hill keeps us up to date with news and finally, the spotlight has been shone on Keith Rimmer who is in the frame. Keith was instrumental in the creation of the apiary's viewing shelter as you will see. A former Secretary and Chairman he also made and sold hives before turning his hand to winter hive protection.

Carolle

www.montybees.org.uk

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News from the Apiary

We have put the 12 apiary colonies to bed for the winter. The mouse guards are on, the feeders are off and an eke with wool insulation put on and they have been ‘ weighed’ with a luggage scale. Their weight will be monitored through the winter.

We have said goodbye to Mark Swain as our apiary manager. The team will miss him. We now have three members who are going to take over. Mike Ashwell has joined us as maintenance manager, Rachel Buckley as Apiary Coordinator with responsibility for the viewing shelter and equipment shed manager and myself as colony manager. We still have a team of 10 apiary team members as Nicky Holmes has joined the team .

The beekeeping year has been challenging, the weather being against us most of the time. We did manage to make increase and provide nucs for beginners. At one point we didn’t think we would get a honey crop, but the weather came good when brambles were out and we extracted some honey and sold it at the shows.

The Sunday training inspections have been well attended and we some ‘Honeybee Health Assessments’ took place.

Rachel Kellaway

Dates for your diary:

Early notice for the Monty Bees annual dinner so you can all get it in your diary! It will be held midday on Sunday 27th April 2025. Venue to be confirmed.

Also, we’ve had to change the date again for our April evening meeting. It will now be held on Monday 7th April 2025.

In the Apiary - Getting Ready for Winter

Wool insulation going on

3" eke over crown board

Weighing the hive

Scorching

Well and truly scorched

Meet the new Management Team

Mike Ashwell

Rachel Buckley

Rachel Kellaway

Winter Bee-wise

As if the beekeeping season this year wasn't challenging enough, Winter is upon us again with winter storms bringing high winds and rain and temperatures yo-yoing between freezing and above 10 degrees. Climate change is definitely bringing us a few nasty surprises already, although Montgomeryshire had it easy in November with Storm Bert compared to other parts of Wales. Hopefully, you have gone into winter with strong queen-right colonies and plentiful stores to get them through to Spring.

Our "Honey Do" is a list of tasks you need to do to be sure your colonies emerge fit and healthy and you are ready for the new season.

Hungry bees? Do your colonies have enough stores until it is warm enough for them to start foraging? Local bees need about 40lb (25kg) to get through winter. Regularly hefting your hives is a quick way to monitor supplies. Alternatively, invest in a set of luggage scales and weigh your hives. If they appear light, feed them fondant.

Safe Bees? Are your hives secure? Hopefully you have fitted mouse guards to stop those pesky little mice from taking up residence and scoffing your honeybees' stores. If there are green woodpeckers about be sure to protect your hives with chicken wire. Are they weighted or strapped down to avoid being blown over by strong winds, or knocked over by sheep straying from the farmer's field next door?

Healthy bees? Winter is the time to treat your colonies for varroa with oxalic acid. Varroa are not only a vector for diseases such as deformed wing virus and varoorsis, but the mites also shorten life span of bees they have been feeding off.

Good House Keeping. Now's the time for some good housekeeping. There is nothing worse than being caught short without equipment to deal with rapid Spring build-up of colonies, not to mention the moment

one of your colonies swarms and you're lucky enough to retrieve the swarm that took off with your favourite queen, because you are ready. Ideally you need double of everything, deep and shallow frames fitted with foundation, spare Nuc boxes. Who said beekeeping was a cheap hobby?

Make an inventory and clean your equipment by scorching, using soda crystals, air-drying and diluted bleach. Check your hive parts are in good repair. I like to give my brood boxes and supers a coat of Danish oil to extend their life. Of course, what you use is a matter of taste. Apparently, bees navigate back to their hives by shape, rather than colour, so think about attaching a little decorative flourish on the front of each hive.

And here's the fun stuff: spending those dark cold days planning next year's beekeeping. A bit of good preparation now will see you fit and ready to realise your beekeeping ambitions; making increase, Queen rearing, double brooding, swarm prevention/management, disease prevention, etc. A good place to start is to review your records. Hopefully you have kept good ones! David Evans, who writes the excellent blog under the pen name The Apiarist, suggests writing a one-line summary for every colony, especially if you are thinking of making an increase. Was the queen vigorous, is the colony disease free, were the bees hygienic, were they 'swarmy' bees, were they quiet during inspections? Reviewing your notes could also be a great learning tool, what did you do in the apiary that worked well/according to plan? What will you avoid doing next year?

How about nipping out on those warmer, dryer days to quietly observe your colonies? What's going on at the entrance? Are the bees popping out for a cleansing flight on warmer sunny days? Is the entrance clear of dead bees; a good trick if you have National Hives is to turn the entrance block up the other way. Put in the varroa board in for a few days and you'll see from the detritus on it where the cluster is and if it appears to be thriving.

Joy Sisley

Snug as a bug!

Honeybees are among the very few insects that produce body heat to survive. They do this by flexing their flight muscles. A honeybee cluster during the cold winter months behaves a bit like a warm-blooded animal, protecting themselves, their precious queen and perhaps a small amount of brood from sometimes sub-zero temperatures for weeks on end.

A valuable (and addictive!) tool for monitoring your colonies during winter, without any disturbance, is a thermal imaging camera. This detects the heat generated by the bees and the images give you some indication of the size and strength of the over-wintering clusters and where they are positioned with the hive. The average temperature inside the cluster is around 35 deg C and it's that heat radiated outwards that the camera detects. Taking snapshots on a regular basis is a fascinating way to track how your cluster of bees are moving around inside during winter and early spring, consuming stores and whether they are in a bottom brood box or perhaps have moved up into a honey super. Monitoring across more than one colony is an exciting way to compare the positions and relative strengths of the clusters in your apiary. Should any weaknesses be detected in the winter or early spring, preventative measures such as additional insulation, creating a barrier against prevailing winds or immediate emergency feeding could be quick rescue interventions.

Typically, the colony cluster is seen as a bright white/yellow ball in the centre of the image with cooler surrounding colours. I took my early birthday present to the MBKA apiary at Gregynog Hall in November to see how our bees are doing!

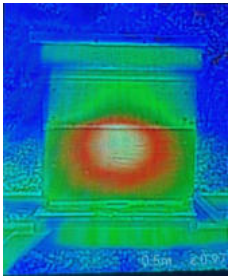

Image 1 - About as good as it gets. The cluster shows as a large, strong bright circular area in the middle of the brood box

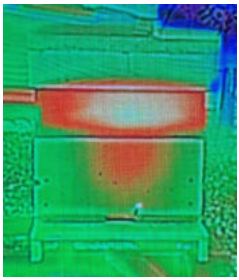

Image 2 - This cluster is positioned in the super, rather than in the brood box. Perhaps there are more stores in the super than the brood box.

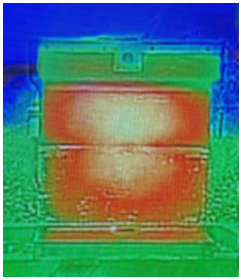

Image 3 - In this hive the cluster is more loosely formed and is much bigger colony.

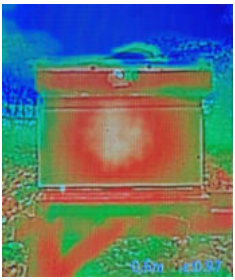

Image 4 - This is a smaller colony in just a brood box, but still the same pattern as the larger ones.

In a rug…!!

In our own apiary at home, we are nurturing a 1st year top bar hive populated early July with a big swarm. The hive walls are pretty thin so as well as wool insulation under the roof, we decided to throw a horse rug over it for the winter to help the colony survive the cold.

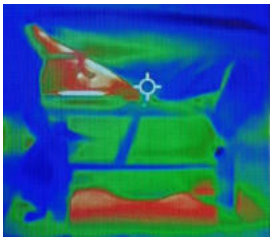

Image 5 – Top bar hive thermal image where the rug is folded back to keep the entrance clear and the protection surrounding the structure it is providing is clearly evident

I'm really looking forward to monitoring the hives at our association apiary and at home It is such an amazing opportunity to have a window into the lives of our bees not usually seen during the dark, cold winter months.

Rachel Buckley

Thermal imaging camera is a Hikmicro E02 retailing at about GBP 230.

Round up of the Shows

Saturday August 10th, our first show, and what a surprise, grey skies, the threat of drizzle. This was the first time that Mony Bees had taken a stand at Llanfyllin Show which is set in the beautiful grounds of Bodfach Park, not that we could see very far due to low cloud. The morning was quiet, few customers and a persistent drizzle. And then, the sun came out and so did the people. It was a fabulous afternoon with the crowning moment being told that we had won the cup for the best commercial stand in the show. We were praised by the president's wife for being informative, engaging and fun. We were thrilled to bits!

Next up was the Berriew Show, always a great day and this year was no different. The weather was kind though not the blazing heat of the last two years. We were so lucky to be sited next to an organisation that had brought along a wide range of birds of prey. But even better, Jill Hill enjoyed 15 minutes of fame!. She was interviewed by George Russell on the work of the Association and the joys of beekeeping. You can still see the video on Russel George's Facebook page.

https://www.facebook.com/RussellGeorgeMS/videos/1095094972040312

Our final show of the season was Newtown Food Festival which turned out to be a ‘show of two halves.’ Saturday was our busiest day ever. We hardly had a moment to take a breath. Of particular interest to people was the information we had on the Yellow Legged Asian Hornet. Most of the visitors had heard of the threat that this hornet poses to pollinators but few knew what to do if they suspected they had seen one. Hopefully they have all downloaded the Asian Hornet App and will be quick to notify of any suspected sightings. We went from the busiest day to the quietest. Sunday was a wet day, a very wet day indeed. Few people braved the elements and so our show season ended with more of a whimper than a bang, but still with plenty of smiles.

As always, Monty Bees could not attend these shows without the willing help of so many of you. I would like to say a huge thankyou to everyone who volunteered whether it be to help set up, man (or woman) the stall, de-rig or simply being there to fetch and carry. The show season may be over but it’s never too early to start planning for next year. Any volunteers?

Jill McAloon

Everything is Coming Up Roses

In the 1960s plastic pots changed the way we gardened for good. The great bare root planting season that straddled the autumn and winter was replaced by pots where everything from herbaceous plants to shrubs and trees was readily available all year. Yet I still buy bare rooted fruit trees and roses at this time of year. I find that not only are they cheaper than their containerised counterparts but they establish faster too because their roots are not being forced to spiral round which, if you do buy a plant in a pot and we all do, should have its roots ruffled and frayed so that the new growth will go outwards rather than circle endlessly.

Rosa Mutabilis

Alexander Rose

Rosa 'Kew Gardens"

Roses are top of my list every year where, being bee minded, I too have a preference for single roses such as Rosa mutabilis pictured here.This is a wonderful rose with a sense of humour for according to the books I should be looking down on its flowers and not up to the roof as it towers above me. Rosa ‘Mutabilis’ is so named because it changes colour, beginning as a deep pink bud, opening to primrose yellow before turning pink and finally a deep claret red. It begins flowering in late May and continues until Christmas and sometimes beyond. However, come late autumn its flowers will remain pallid yellow and this is solely because it is no longer visited by the bees.

Bees love members of the ‘rosa’ family, which includes apple, cherry and plum trees as pictured here but it is roses that top my list every year for now is the time to buy them from specialist nurseries like David Austin and Peter Beales. Looking round my garden I can list a dozen single and semi-double roses bought from David Austin including ‘The Alexander Rose’, whose single petals are stained deep peach whilst ‘The Lark Ascending’ reaches upwards with pale peach semi-double flowers.

Dunwich Rose

A few seasons ago I ordered ‘Francis E. Lester’ a rambler with single flowers of blush white with every petal edged in pale pink. Although it only flowers once it has covered a four metre long arch, following on from the apple trees that it frames, and in autumn is festooned with bunches of rose hips.

David Austin’s bare root roses arrive in a sturdy paper sack and provided the soil isn’t frozen should be planted after plunging the roots in water for two hours to ensure they are rehydrated. Any broken roots should be cut back and then the roots should be dusted with mycorrhisol fungi before planting in the centre of a pre-dug hole with the stems 5cm below the top of the hole. Backfill and lightly firm and water in. If you can’t plant immediately then simply make a shallow trench and place the rose at an angle and cover the roots with soil so that they are protected until the rose can be planted permanently. If the soil is frozen and this has happened to me in the past, then plant them temporarily in a pot filled with compost.

Carolle Doyle

Bees For Development

There is a shop on Agincourt Street in Monmouth selling honey and bee keeping equipment together with gifts of all things bee. The smart green sign above the windows states ‘Bees for Development’ for the shop is the home of a small charity with a very big idea and an immense global presence. It is also the home town of Nicola Bradbear who founded the charity thirty years ago with the aim of ‘making life better with bees’ firstly in Africa and secondly in other undeveloped regions of the world.

Quite how she went about this was explained by Chris Keywood, one of the charity’s three project managers, who had travelled up from Monmouth to deliver our first talk of the season. He explained that Nicola knew that bee-keeping in Africa had been practiced long before the first Celt made a skep but she also knew that bee-keeping was on the periphery of African life. Her big idea was that through international agencies and governments the charity could not only raise communities out of poverty through sustainable bee-keeping but in doing so preserve and in some cases restore the diverse and rich habitat that was home to the African honey bee.

Could countries such as Uganda, Ghana and Ethiopia embrace sustainable bee-keeping? Chris was here to say that yes, they could. A native of South Africa himself, he took us through the projects that have become part and parcel of life in these parts of the world. There was a wry smile on Chris’s face as he told us that of course beekeeping equipment needed to be very cheap and as a matter of fact it needn’t cost anything except time.

Pictured here are hives made of hollowed out logs and in a series of Chris’s slides we saw hives made of bamboo and of clay all locally sourced and all standing the test of time that could be counted in Millenia rather than years. Such structures not only provided a harvest of honey but also of wax which in frameless hives is a valuable commodity. Nor is harvesting confined to one season for unlike our

honey-bees which contract to a small colony to survive the winter African bees have no such necessity.

What bee-keepers there need isn't equipment but a market for honey and most especially wax and a habitat suited to the bees needs where deforestation has laid waste the land. A planting programme has returned wasteland to species rich habitat where the bees, for their part, ensure the continued regeneration of plant life through pollination.

Chris ran through just a few projects including Ghana's honey and beeswax processing centre which, thanks to its creation, now services 500 bee-keepers. In Ethiopia, which is one of his special areas of interest, he talked about bee-keeping where the bees pollinated wild coffee in the forested flanks of the mountains. Here, thanks to the bees, was a second harvest of wild coffee beans which could be sold at a premium. Ghana has also established 'Buzz Clubs' in schools where apiaries have been set up to teach children bee-keeping. It's an idea that is spreading and it looks to the next generation of bee-keepers.

This is just a very small taste of an immensely inspiring talk which by no means covers the work of this charity which has, incidentally, met all 17 of its sustainable development goals. To find out more about these goals and the charity itself do take a moment to visit www.beesfordevelopment.org and, better still, visit the shop on Agincourt Street. I certainly intend to.

Carolle Doyle

Bees in the News

Pesticide protection

The effect of neonicotinoids on the nervous system of bees has been well-documented. Despite this, and the banning of their use by the EU, the pesticides are still used regularly across the world including the UK for “emergency treatment” of sugar beet since 2021. Some small comfort can be taken in the research by Julia S Caserto and colleagues at Cornell University in New York, studying a method of protecting bees from the effects of these dangerous chemicals. The results published in Nature Sustainability at the beginning of September showed that hydrogel microparticles fed to the common eastern bumblebee (Bombus impatiens) in syrup resulted in a 30% higher survival rate in treated bees exposed to lethal doses of imidacloprid. The microparticles bind to the pesticide to neutralise its effect, allowing it to pass through the digestive tract and be excreted. Scientists hope to test the treatment on honeybees. Of course, it would be much better if countries stopped using neonicotinoids!

Another insect invader to worry about

Just as we are all getting to grips with the yellow-legged Asian Hornet incursion, another invading insect from Asia is looming on the horizon. The red dwarf honeybee (Apis florea) has recently been discovered near the major cargo hub of Birzebbuga freeport in Malta, the first time it has been found in Europe. A colony of about 2,000 individuals was found wrapped around a tree branch. It was destroyed but researchers suspect the colony had already swarmed. Although Apis florea does not attack our native bees, it has the potential to introduce novel diseases to them, as well as competing for nectar and pollen.

Old bees

At the end of a busy beekeeping season of weekly inspections, swarm prevention, feeding, varroa monitoring and treatment, and cleaning kit, it is somewhat depressing to read of a man in Scotland who decided to start beekeeping in 2015 by finding his long-dead grandfather’s hives. He located a very dilapidated hive in a disused quarry, untouched and with no human intervention since 2007, and found it still contained a

healthy thriving colony of bees! He now runs between 90 and 100 colonies; all split from that original colony.

Screening for honey fraud

Almost £90m worth of honey was imported into the UK last year but evidence shows that a significant amount of this may be adulterated with rice or corn syrups and is not pure honey. An easy, quick method for detecting honey which has been interfered with has been the focus of research at Cranfield University in Bedfordshire. A team lead by Dr Maria Anastasiadi, working with the Food Standards Agency and the Science and Technology Council UK, has used a specialist light analysis technique to identify the presence of rice and corn syrups in jars of honey. A non-invasive Spatial Offset Raman Spectroscopy is portable and easy to implement and can identify culprits without the jar being opened. Another test being investigated is the use of DNA bar-coding which can detect the presence of even very small amounts of rice and corn syrup DNA in honey.

Varroa becoming part of beekeeping in Australia

Two years have passed since Varroa destructor was discovered in sentinel hives in New South Wales. Despite a huge biosecurity response costing in the region of $132m and the destruction of about 30,000 colonies, Australian beekeepers are coming to terms with the realisation that varroa is now established and will inevitably spread across the whole country. The focus has moved from eradication to management, with 110 workshops planned across the country to educate beekeepers at all levels about the tasks we have been following in the UK since the mite was discovered in 1992.

It will be mandatory for all beekeepers with fewer than 10 hives to monitor them all, while those with 10 or more will be required to monitor 10% of them. There are approximately 250,000 hobby beekeepers in Australia, producing about 10,000 tonnes of honey annually. The increased workload and estimated cost of $55 per hive for treatments mean many are likely to give up. Reinfestations are to be expected until feral honeybee populations die out, in about five years' time.

Jill Hills

In The Frame

Keith Rimmer is one of those people for whom the phrase ‘dive right in’ was created. In 2012 Keith dived into bee-keeping and were it an Olympic event rather than a traditional pastime of country folk he would sport a couple of gold medals by now.

A year earlier in 2011 Keith and his partner, Sian had moved to a converted barn with very large gardens in Caersws. They were living the rural life, growing vegetables and fruit and collecting eggs from their free range chickens. Bees would fit right in. All it took was a visit to Llanidloes and a chance meeting with former MBKA chairman Tony Shaw with his observation hive as he was giving a talk about beekeeping and the Montgomeryshire Beekeeping Association.

Keith & Sian promptly joined and in a very little time acquired four second hand Smith hives, which are smaller than Nationals. Tony mentored Keith as he embarked on an intense six month course on husbandry with Tony and Lynfa Davies. At that time members held ‘Open Hive’ days which were instructive and fun although the association had started an apiary of its own in a remote but easily accessible area of Gregynog whose manager was open to the idea as an attraction for visitors providing, of course, that they could watch the bees from the safety of a shelter.

Keith drew up a design on the back of a cigarette packet, Gregynog felled an oak tree for the frame and Paul Edmunds, Keith's fellow director of Welsh Oak Frame generously offered its services in making and erecting the viewing shelter, after all his father had been a bee-keeper.

Keith was now fully submerged in the society taking on the role of Secretary for two years before hopping over to the job of Chairman. In his own apiary he not only replaced the Smiths with Nationals but began manufacturing National beehives. For the next four years he sold Nationals at the Royal Welsh Show and the RWSA November Winter Fair.

Spare time was devoted to bees including swarm collection. Keith grinned at a wonderful memory of a large feral colony lodged in the flat roof of Ardleen school fascia. Keith donned his suit, lit the smoke and retired to his car to wait for the children to be picked up by their parents. He was spotted by an inquisitive little girl as he slumped in the back with the hood of his bee-suit up and smoker going full blast on the floor. In mounting excitement she asked Keith if he was a spaceman and spinning on her heels she shot off shouting 'Mum, there's a spaceman come to get the bees!' It was an out of the world moment.

Eight years and one heart by-pass operation later Keith and Sian moved and their bees were relocated to a relative's farm in Trefeglwys . Happily they are still staunch and committed members for Sian is our hard-working Treasurer. As for Keith, he has embarked on another bee related project and it is all to do with protecting the bees over winter. With winters getting wetter protecting the hives with Hive Wraps he makes himself. Keith points out that winter protection is key to good and strong overwintering bees Keith's answer is a breathable Hive wrap which will keep the bees snug through the wind and driving rains, during mild spells can be taken off in seconds and replaced as required. It looks as though Bee-hive Man pictured here is about to change into Bee-hive Wrap Man. You read it here first.

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.

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