

Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association



A Hive of Knowledge for New and Developing Beekeepers.

Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association – MBKA, (Monty Bees) in Powys, has a long history of teaching and training new beekeepers. The association has two trainers, both with a background in education, an active and supportive committee and an energetic and welcoming apiary team.

There are three over-arching tenets to all our training:

- Teach people how to keep bees by putting bee welfare first
- All members of the association, including beginners, are encouraged to keep locally adapted bees
- The importance of all pollinators

Monty Bees offers three levels of training courses: Beginners, Improvers and Intermediates. In addition, we also offer training in Disease, Pests and Poisoning, Queen Rearing using the Miller Method and study groups for the WBKA Basic Assessment Award, BBKA Honeybee Health Award and the BBKA Module Exams. If a member of the association has a particular interest and would like some training on any other aspects of beekeeping, we will always try our best to facilitate.

Our training year begins with awareness raising – and this happens in various ways. In the Summer, we attend local country shows within Montgomeryshire; we promote the importance of pollinators, sell the apiary honey and honey products, and answer many questions from the visitors who would like to begin their beekeeping journey. In addition, we advertise the dates for training on the dedicated training page on our website and in our wonderful association journal – the Beeholder. We regularly have more than 18 beginner beekeepers signing up to the training each year.



Monty Bees set up for the crowds at a local country show.

During the Winter months we host talks in the evening for all members – and especially welcome beginners to come along and meet fellow beekeepers over a cuppa and cake and take part in the raffle (where everyone seems to win a prize). Recent talks have included topics such as Bee stings, Mead (with tasting of different types of mead - that was a well-attended evening!), the important of Drones and the annual 'Ask the Expert Event', where a panel of association members (often with a combined beekeeping experience of over 100 years) answer any questions that people bring (as with all questions in beekeeping – there is often three different answers).

Key to all our training, at all levels, is the Association Apiary – our training apiary, based at the historic and beautiful Gregynog Hall, in Tregynon. This is run by a ten-person strong apiary team, all of whom have been through the training programme, and had a 'train the trainee' programme when they joined the team. The majority of the Apiary Team have achieved the Basic Assessment Award, some have also achieved the BBKA Honeybee Health Award and had success in BBKA Module Exams.

The apiary is open every Sunday, weather permitting, to any member of the association to attend, free of charge. During these sessions, members, especially beginners, get the chance to handle bees in small groups, with a member of the apiary team to guide them and answer questions. The apiary also supports the WBKA in hosting various training events, most recently hosting the General Husbandry Award preparation training.



Public signs to MBKA Training Apiary at Gregynog Hall.

Beginner Beekeeper Training

Beginners have three sessions before the start of the beekeeping season: one theory and two practical. The theory is a social and learning occasion. Before attending the first session, we encourage beginners to think about where they would like to site their apiary; beginners are asked to bring photos or videos as this is a useful tool to help advise people – following discussion, most people will make their final decision prior to leaving the sessions. Topics for the theory session often fall under the following categories:

- Siting an apiary
- Equipment, cost and where to purchase
- Records and record keeping
- Varroa
- Hygiene, bio-security and how to achieve it
- NBU and role of bee inspectors
- The colony of bees
- Resources

We have basic equipment in the room for everyone to look at and handle, including a 'virtual hive', we do have to say to beginners that it isn't as easy to find the queen in real life, though!

From experience this is enough to do in the first theory session, and although most people are excited to get on with their beekeeping journey, there is also a sense of apprehension, as is to be expected. To help beginners with any questions that they may have or to try and ease any worries we utilise WhatsApp Groups. These groups are often very active, are a first line of support and are used to ask

general questions, share photos with each other or signpost to resources. There is also a dedicated training officer email address for Monty Bees.

The first practical training session is held at the apiary. The topics we cover in this session are:

- How to light a smoker, fuel and safety
- How to make up a frame with foundation
- Suits, gloves and basic tool kit for the first year
- The wooden national hive
- Practical considerations in an apiary, risk assessments and bio-security
- Hygiene and stings

The second practical is opening and inspecting a colony and getting beginners to start handling bees and getting used to the new 'sensation'.

After these sessions, we find that the beginners come along to most Sunday apiary sessions. MBKA members and the apiary team make up nucs of local calm bees which are available in June/July. We further support beginners when they have their bees with members who volunteer as mentors. We utilise social media and WhatsApp groups to keep in contact and as a first line of support, if needed.

Each apiary session is based around best practice and aspects of the WBKA Basic Assessment syllabus.

Later in the year, beginners have the option to attend a further theory session in May/June on disease, pests and poisoning. This is led by our training officers with short presentations by those who are undertaking the HBH or M3 to aid their learning.



Monty Bees Training Apiary at Gregynog Hall in early Spring.

Improver Beekeeper Training

Improvers have a theory session in February. This covers skills needed in the second year of keeping bees, these include:

- Plans for the year
- Kit for the year, including any extra equipment needed
- Spring inspection
- Growth of a colony
- Swarming
- Queen problems
- Artificial swarm
- Making increase
- Brood diseases
- Adult bee diseases

In addition, this session is also their introduction on how to make their own second colony, by splitting of their colony.

The practical session for improvers includes aspects of:

- Spring inspection
- How to do a disease inspection
- Finding the queen
- Artificial swarm methods
- Making increase

When our improver beekeepers make it to this stage, many are worried about swarming. Within the practical sessions we look at pro-active and reactive methods for swarm control.

At the end of the season, many of our improvers will join one of our study groups and decide whether they would like to undertake the WBKA Basic Assessment. They all surprise themselves how much they already know.

Intermediate Beekeeper Training

Intermediates are in their third year of beekeeping and the majority have undertaken all the training offered by Monty Bees. Intermediate theory training consists of:

- Managing comb
- Bailey comb change
- Shook swarm
- Queen problems
- Finding the queen
- Disease inspections
- Splitting on swarm cells (Queen rearing)
- Healthy bees
- Bee behaviour (Communication by sound)

The theory is based around comb building and comb replacement methods. At this level we also begin to introduce honeybee communication.

The practical session builds on the different methods of changing comb, including the Bailey comb change and shook swarm.

There is often a sense of sadness at the end of the intermediate training; trainers and trainees have been working together for three years or more, with a shared passion and enthusiasm – and often friends have been made. However, should intermediates wish to continue they can join one of our study groups and look at undertaking the BBKA Module exams. Many members comment that the module exams are the first time they have undertaken a written examination since they were at school (we won't comment on the length of time since school), however, the sessions are also a social activity with tea and coffee, cake, lots of banter and support for each other.

This stage is also a good opportunity for recruiting new mentors and apiary team members.

As we say to all our trainee beekeepers, learning never ends – the bees are continuously teaching us. As people embark on their beekeeping journey, remember that the dance of a successful beekeeper involves, harmony, patience and luck. Allow the bees to guide you and let the hum of your hives be the soundtrack to your learning.

Happy beekeeping!

Rachel Kellaway and Simon Anderson

MBKA Training and Education Officers,