



MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS  
ASSOCIATION

E Version of

# The BeeHolder

July 2010



*Warré hive at Gregynog Apiary as seen from the public viewing area through the security net*

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To arrange for a visit by a Bee Disease Officer,  
contact Frank who will make the necessary arrangements

**CENTRAL SCIENCE LAB:** 01904 462510

**Any of these contacts can be used to ask a Bee Question.  
They will pass it on if they cannot answer you themselves.  
They are here to help you**



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS  
ASSOCIATION**

**FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

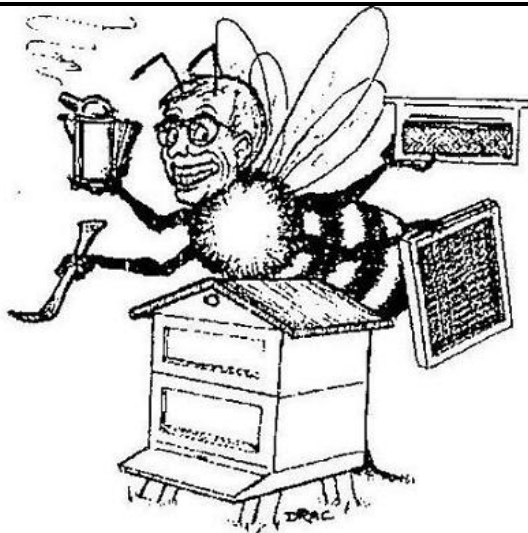
July 19 <sup>th</sup> - July 22 <sup>nd</sup> Monday to Thursday	Royal Welsh Show, <b>Bee Section</b> in South Glamorgan Hall, Royal Welsh Showground, Llanellwedd, Builth Wells
July 25 <sup>th</sup> Sunday 2.00pm	<b>MBKA</b> Apiary Visit Host Fran Blockley Old Chapel Farm, Tylwch, Llanidloes SY18 6JR tel 01686 412744 grid ref
August 13 <sup>th</sup> / 14 <sup>th</sup>	Shrewsbury Flower Show
August 28 <sup>th</sup> Saturday	Bee disease day Gregynog Hall With regional and seasonal Bee Inspectors
September 4 <sup>th</sup> & 5 <sup>th</sup>	Food Festival at Glansevern Hall, Berriew <b>Bee Stall</b> run by <b>MBKA</b>
September 19 <sup>th</sup> Sunday 2.00pm	<b>MBKA</b> Apiary Visit Host Keith & Philomena Wood The Wintles, Bishops Castle, SY9 5BF tel 01588 638242 grid ref SO 321 892
October 21 <sup>st</sup> Thursday 7.00pm	<b>MBKA</b> Professor Rose Cooper (awaiting confirmation) Healing properties of Honey Gregynog Hall , Tregynon
November 18 <sup>th</sup> Thursday 7.00pm	<b>MBKA</b> TBA Gregynog Hall , Tregynon



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Nice to note that the contributions from MBKA members is going up !!



## **BRIAN NORRIS**

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## Editorial

We'll all have noticed the great improvement of the Welsh Beekeeper's Magazine Gwennywyr Cymru since Brian and Cherry Clark took it over. The magazine had been languishing on the edge of extreme parochial tedium for years and now has a broader aspect and more modern layout. The magazine had to be upgraded because it was being outclassed by some of the local bee magazines (including our own BeeHolder). In turn the upgraded National Magazine has led to some subtle changes in our local magazines. Why repeat the seasonal bee instructions when they are so adequately covered by The Welsh BeeKeeper? There are only so many times one can be bombarded by a Snelgrove board!

However, the day-to-day practicalities of beekeeping are better covered locally. For example, we have had over-swarming locally, yet a few weeks ago I met an experienced beekeeper from Cheshire who remarked that the dearth of swarming behaviour up there was causing problems; two near-adjacent areas, two entirely different problems. I put our excess swarming down to the poor queen mating last year: our local weather was so much worse than that in Cheshire. Our local unique set of bee problems will be tackled at the Montgomery Training Apiary at Gregynog. Our aim is to replicate the range of hives and bee-keeping philosophies that our MBKA members follow. We will be collecting anecdotal evidence about best practices rather than undertaking any scientific study. I have noted more scepticism than enthusiasm for the various schemes proposed for research apiaries. Unless attached to a well-funded university programme the diverse views of local beekeepers will either tear the research apart or some local members will be excluded from participation. How much better to recognise that within the diverse practices of hobbyist beekeepers there probably lies the solution to most, if not all, of today's bee woes. A case in point is the now-accepted use of icing sugar sprinkled over frames of bees to counteract Varroa. This was a gimmick that came from a hippy in Germany whose success caused a local then national, then international acceptance of the idea. Such a meme (*idea which can be propagated, via natural selection, like a gene*) would never have originated at a university. "*I think icing sugar on bees might help reduce varroa. Give me some money please*" would lead to a definite NO. Whereas "*icing sugar has been found empirically to reduce varroa infestation. Can I have some money to find out why and how best to apply the substance?*" might lead to a YES.

"Think globally, act locally" said Schumacher. And that is what local beekeeping is about. Whether we breed for honey production, disease resistance, good temperament or stock increase; or whether we have bees for the pollination or honey or merely as a marker to show that we are concerned about the environment; or whether we take up committee posts to help a local bee organisation, we are all acting locally but thinking of the bigger picture of a world in crisis because our bees are in trouble. The hope lies in the amateur who is prepared to risk a few hives for a principle: a commercial beekeeper could never run the risk of losing all his/her hives. So at the next apiary meeting, on 25<sup>th</sup> July, let's all drink a Pimms to all those crazy ideas that beekeepers have and defend so passionately. The government, through its Bee Inspectors, may wish to push ideas about best practices (see bee disease training day page 10), but there is rarely a case of a "worst practice." Don't be afraid of beeing different: within your difference may lie the salvation of the world. Has anybody given a medal to that crazy German hippy?

See Pages 19 and 20 for what is going on at our Training Apiary.

Tony Shaw July 2010

# We welcome as new members

Mark Jones/Caersws, Fiona Moulton/ Machynlleth, Nicola Platt/ Kerry, Alan Smart/ Llanfyllin, Roger Thomas/Montgomery

As usual the Data Protection Act prevents my publishing emails and addresses of members, but I can recommend the local telephone directory.

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## Report on Meetings

### Beginners Course – April 3<sup>rd</sup> With Master Keeper Brian Goodwin

On a bright but not particularly sunny Easter Saturday, some twenty or so “|wannabees”, “newbees” or “nearly newbees”, gathered in the main seminar room at Plas Dolerw in Newtown to listen to Brian Goodwin provide an all day beginners training session. Settled comfortably on a tall stool at the front of the room, Brian had the relaxed and quietly enthusiastic air of a man who had kept bees for some sixty or more years, and who didn’t expect to be wrong footed by any questions we might ask him. The structure of the day was provided by some thirty or more worksheets which Brian distributed to each of us a sheet at a time as he took us through an extraordinarily wide range of topics all of which are undoubtedly highly pertinent to the novice beekeeper. We did our best to test Brian’s knowledge with many interruptions and questions timed to coincide with whatever urgent thought was buzzing around in our own brain regardless of where Brian had reached in the structure of the day, all of which questions Brian answered with great patience and insight.

We learned about the makeup of a typical hive, bee foraging distances and areas, the plants, bushes and trees which provide the best pollen and nectar at different times of the year, the roles and genesis of drones, workers, and queens, and how a colony supports itself through a typical year. We also learned about the equipment involved in beekeeping from hive and frame design through to opinions about what fuel is best to keep a smoker working effectively for as long as possible. Apparently rotten wood does the trick! These are just samples of the topics covered during the day.

One of the more fascinating topics for me was the subject of drone congregation areas, where drones from throughout an area travel as far as fifteen miles to congregate in hot weather looking for rising thermal currents where they wait expectantly for any available local virgin queens to arrive and mate. Apparently queens may go to the same congregation area for several days until they are “fully” mated.

We were allowed a short break for lunch but even this time was used productively with a slide show while we munched our sandwiches. I think it would be a fair reflection of the day to say that it ended with us all feeling exhausted but elated at the extent of our new found knowledge. The word “guru” is undoubtedly overused nowadays, but not it has to be said, in Brian’s case. We extend our thanks to Brian for such a great start to our beekeeping journey, and I would highly recommend the course to any relatively inexperienced beekeepers. Experienced beekeepers would undoubtedly learn a thing or two as well.

Bill Jones

## **MBKA Training Mornings with Seasonal Bee Inspector John Beavan**

Being relatively fresh to beekeeping (my first bees arrived in September 2008 ), I was delighted to hear that John Beavan was to be running some training sessions through MBKA this spring. I attended the session about varroa in Llanfyllin at Andy's house and the session on swarm control at David and Jessica's home in Newtown.

My uncle is an 89 year old beekeeper in Harrogate, who still runs weekend training courses in the apiary at Harlow Carr Gardens. I attended one of these excellent weekends before getting my bees and this gave me a measure of confidence and copious notes. As with so many fields of learning, however, I have since discovered that the more that I know, the more I realise there is to know. The morning on varroa was focussed on explaining and recommending a consistent approach using regular monitoring and treating with Apiguard in August and oxalic acid solution in December. Icing sugar dusting was also demonstrated. I was able to appreciate how important it is that each geographical area settles on a method and sticks to it, until it is updated in response to mite resistance. From the course in Yorkshire, I have supplies of Bayvarol and formic acid, these being the treatments of choice in that area. I shall give them back.

We were a group of eight, which seemed just the right size. John managed to balance delivering lots of information whilst encouraging us to ask questions. The handouts were clear and comprehensive and although it was too cold to visit Andy's hives, the morning was extremely helpful.

The session on swarm control that I went to was held at David and Jessica Bennett's home on a hot morning, so we were able to be outside and visit the hives. Again the information was clear, well-delivered, and supported with useful handouts. On this occasion, however, two hours did not seem long enough. So many aspects of swarm management were introduced that it was impossible to do them all justice. Having said that, I went home and was bold enough to make up a nucleus on the following day.

As a novice beekeeper, I found these two mornings extremely helpful and was very glad to have been able to attend. There was no charge and the hospitality of Andy, Jessica and David was wonderful. Teaching sessions are invaluable and it was exciting to hear that there is a possibility of a permanent training centre being set up at the apiary in Gregynog.

**Ros Parnell**

(Ros is a member of Shropshire BKA her attendance was a recognition that we can run friendly relaxed training sessions in our area. **Ed.**)

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## **Apiary Visit Roy Norris, Newtown May 16th**

At last, after a year's delay, we managed to get to Roy's apiary to see his collection of solitary bees enthusiastically demonstrated by Nigel Jones, Roy has erected a series of solitary bee "hives" which consist of a piece of log or bamboo drilled with deep holes of different diameter, it seems that each type of bee is very particular as to the exact size of hole it requires, most of these bees are very short lived and the males, which hatch before the females, seem to have only one thing on their mind!, Nigel was very pleased with the number of different species identified, all have

impossible names, it would appear that the scientific name, the only moniker they have, is in all cases, in inverse proportion to the size of the insect.



To the left Nigel Jones of the solitary bee unit demonstrates the correct way of collecting an insect after swooshing the net across a meadow. It was lucky that the group was divided into two, one half doing Solitary bees and the other around Roy's honeybee Hives. If those inspecting Roy's hives had stepped back they would have been in the lake

Roy's bees live in a purpose built mansion on the edge of their private lake, most of his colonies have only arrived recently and are still in the process of being integrated into the apiary.

Paula reports that a foal was expected so I imagine it has now arrived

Many thanks to Paula and Roy for a very pleasant and interesting afternoon

**Joe Bidwell**

I felt the most pertinent of the day was made by Nigel Jones, "Whilst the other group are worried about any parasites they find here we are delighting in the bee parasites we may find in this meadow" **Ed.**

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## June Apiary Meeting 20<sup>th</sup> June 2010

The June meeting was hosted by Tony Morgan and Lorraine Ward. Their apiary is at their home in Abercegir, Machynlleth – a sheltered location at about 50m altitude, among village gardens and their 1 acre nature reserve beside the Nant Gwydol.

Tony and Lorraine have been beekeeping for 5 years and currently have 7 colonies and one nucleus.

There was an impressive turn-out to the meeting, which was held at 5 o'clock – fortunately an afternoon of the warm and sunny weather we have become accustomed to over the past several weeks. Steve Griffiths, the new Estate Manager at Gregynog had been invited to join us, as he will be first on hand at the MBKA apiary recently established there.

Tom Brown demonstrated how we should open our hives and handle our bees. He began by showing us his Beekeeper's Toolbox. This is a wooden box, in which he can stand his tools upright allowing easy access –(especially important for lone beekeepers with both hands busy). He explained the use of all his tools. I was especially taken with the leadweighted goosefeather – how easily the all-important feather can drift on a light breeze! He also emphasised the absolute importance of record-keeping. As it is crucial to do this on the spot in a form you can later understand, it is helpful to have a reasonably weather-proof system and a spare pencil.

Tom handles bees very gently and thoughtfully. He showed us how to move the hive parts slowly and carefully, minimising the crushing of any bees, and observing in the process the current state of the colony, with helpful comments from Jim Crundwell.

This was a strong colony – a well-developed May swarm with what Tony described as a 'magnificent' queen, indicating the importance of queen-quality. Steve Griffiths was invited to handle a frame of bees whilst his photograph was taken for University of Wales publicity purposes (Subsequently the magnificent queen was found to be on this frame!). There was a chance to distinguish between workers, drones and queen, and to see eggs and brood in different stages. Our summer meetings provide a brilliant opportunity for beginners to actually handle the bees. Tom also described the procedure of removing drone brood as a method of varroa control.

The subject of Jim Crundwell's demonstration was another strong colony, with two supers on. This colony had not yet produced any queen cells. Jim showed us the desirable ratio of brood in all stages, and discussed the different styles of frame spacers. Tony had used wide spacers (usually used in supers) on alternate frames in the brood box – an economical alternative (or emergency stop-gap) to using narrow spacers on every frame. A technique for 'Preventing Swarms without Creating a Young Colony' which Tony had in operation on a neighbouring hive was discussed. Tony found this method in a German-published beekeeping book he found at a car-boot sale. He had photocopies of the relevant page available (with which he will happily provide anyone else who is interested, and details of the book). Jim did point out the disadvantages situating hives in a straight line, associated with bees drifting from one hive to the next.

We were told about Tony's experiments with a temperature sensor in a hive, and to see on a screen the interior of an occupied hive via a bird nestbox camera; the screen was rather obscured by bees!

By this time most of us were feeling very warm and thirsty and ready to free ourselves of suits and gloves, and to gather on the terrace for a wonderful feast and a glass of Pimms; suitable reward for hard-working beekeepers!

MBKA meetings are an excellent forum for all beekeepers to share experiences and information, and for new beekeepers to learn from old; the more good information and encouragement beginners have the more likely they are to be beekeeping in 5 years time.

Tony has been fortunate to have Tom as mentor: – Tom now insists he is his equal!

Thanks, Lorraine and Tony, for hosting such an informative and enjoyable evening in a very beautiful setting.

Pippa Scott

# Why Apiary Meetings are important

(a message from Our President, Master Beekeeper, Jim Crundwell )

Herbie Parker was a jobbing gardener, that is he worked for people with large gardens too big to manage, but not large enough to warrant a full-time gardener. As such Herbie worked for our neighbour one day a week. Importantly to me he was a beekeeper. As I had started beekeeping with a beginner's outfit from Taylors and had no contact with another beekeeper, Herbie was a godsend, he corrected my mistakes and misconceptions. I thought he was a terrific beekeeper, later I realise that he was wrong about some things, but he got lots of honey. Because he was self employed he was in a position to collect stray swarms and was never short of bees.

I did have a book "Beekeeping" by Joseph Tinsley which was alright as far as it went, but one of its shortcomings was advice on the use of the smoker. " If the bees get irritable or out of hand, they can be controlled by (the) application of a little more smoke" According to Ada Rowse with who I worked later, Joe did not always practice what he preached. She had been a student at West Scotland College of Agriculture where he was Lecturer in Beekeeping.

It is very difficult to learn practical beekeeping without seeing it done by a competent person. That is why apiary meetings are so valuable. Every beekeeper needs a Herbie Parker. If you have a few years experience, please consider becoming a mentor to someone near you who may be floundering. At least make contact and exchange 'phone numbers. Offer the loan of equipment such as honey extractor. Herbie lent me his for my first crop, 9lbs about which he was rather dismissive but to me it was a triumph.

Jim Crundwell

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## FUTURE EVENTS

**July Apiary Meeting Sunday 25<sup>th</sup> Tylwch, Llanidloes**

This is an interesting venue. A collection of old buildings converted, with considerable panache, into a home for training workshops into rural crafts, stone carving and Archaeological digs. Contrast the range of innovative energy saving additions to these old buildings to the new-build energy-efficient housing to be seen during the September Apiary meeting. And all this before we get to the bees!

## Training Day, Bee Diseases and Basic Assessment Exam

**Saturday 28<sup>th</sup> August 10am to 4pm Sunday 28<sup>t</sup> at The Montgomeryshire Training Apiary at Gregynog, Tregynon,**

The day will be run by John Beavan Seasonal Bee Inspector with fellow SBI Peter Guthrie and their boss Welsh Regional Bee Inspector Frank Gellatly. They will be available to advise on diseases and to test bees from members' hives for Nosema. Members should bring along samples of their bees for microscopic examination. Details of how to collect bees will be sent to members later. For details of the basic assessment see July 2008 edition of BeeHolder pages 7, 8 & 9 or [http://www.britishbee.org.uk/files/syllabuses/basic\\_all.pdf](http://www.britishbee.org.uk/files/syllabuses/basic_all.pdf) . If you're contemplating the Basic Assessment:- Please don't be put off by the title 'Basic Assessment' – on the one hand, it is not so

'basic' that it is not worth it nor is it trivial; on the other hand it is a face-to-face test, and the assessor will do everything possible to direct you towards the right answers during the session. The nature of the assessment, both practical and oral, involves both procedures and knowledge of bees and disease. To be eligible for the assessment you must have 'managed at least one colony for a minimum of 12 months'

For the moment, remember the day and come to visit the Gregynog Apiary and examine the collection of hives

Only MBKA members will be permitted within the apiary but guests, including your children and grandchildren can view the activities from the public viewing areas behind the security barriers.

To add to the fun there will be a B Xfactor event.

**September 4 & 5<sup>th</sup>** We will need help on the MBKA stall at the Glansevern Food Festival. Helpers can get into the festival FREE if they help out on the stall. Please liaise with Secretary Jessica about what times you can do. Going on our experience of the last two years volunteers are kept busy with questions from the public.

## **September Apiary Meeting Sunday 19<sup>th</sup> Bishops Castle**

The Wintles, part of Bishop's Castle, is an eco-village with community woodland, allotments, apiary, etc. Although each household is independent the residents are active in participating in community activities, such as woodland and meadow maintenance, chickens, pigs, and beekeeping. Currently the apiary has around a dozen hives, including 2 polystyrene. Charles Millar (area Seasonal Bee Inspector) will be attending.



The famous Bishop's Castle Michaelmas Fair will be running on Sept 18-19 - further details can be found at <http://www.michaelmasfair.org.uk>. Parking will be available at the Wintles for MBKA visitors. Do the Fair, see the Apiary, and do the Fair again. Take advantage of the Wintles' car park. Who said there weren't perks in being a member of the MBKA?

# Advice from the Past

I have always been fascinated by bees. Although my family did not keep bees I grew up being told stories of how people who did would tell the bees about important events in the life of the family. My mother would say, "Now that is something we should tell the bees". I wished we had a beehive so that I could.

I grew up in the hills of North Somerset. We grew most of our own food and had several apple trees in the garden including two Sheep's Nose cider apple trees, which I like but my favourite cider apple is the Morgan Sweet. At apple time, my father would take us for a walk to the next village where Morgan Sweets grew in the garden of a pub. The name of the pub was The Beehive.

I have always grown fruits and vegetables but have never kept bees. Then, in 2008, I visited the Welsh Food Fair at Glansevern Hall. The MBKA stall was like a magnet; I spent most of the afternoon there, talking to the incredibly enthusiastic people running it. As a result my husband and I joined the association, attended meetings throughout the winter, and in the summer of 2009 got our first bees. We were both very excited but found it very daunting as well. The worry of not knowing what to do was lifted off our shoulders by a member of MBKA who has become our mentor, without his help and the encouragement of other members of the association we would probably not have taken on such a responsibility.

Since getting our bees we talk about them all the time. Our friends and family probably think we have become 'bee bores' but recently I had a surprise. My cousin, who has become the family archivist, wrote telling me that our great grandfather, who I only knew was a builder, had also been a beekeeper. So, there was already a tradition of bee keeping in my family but I did not know it! My great grandfather James Gair lived in Scotland, north of Inverness. Included with my cousin's letter was a copy of an article James had published. The title of the article was



Great Grandfather James Gair



"Bee-keeping in Ross-shire", and in it he gives advice to beginner beekeepers. I find it is exciting to receive advice from my great grandfather, that he wrote many years before I was born. My cousin also sent me a photograph that shows beehives sitting in a potato patch. James Gair took these hives up to the heather at flowering time.

Also in the photo is his carpentry workshop with beehives built into the side. This was to give all-weather access to the hives, and apparently one of the hives had a window inside the workshop for observation. Honey in the comb was sent to my grandmother in Somerset where she had gone to find work, then met my grandfather and never returned home to Scotland.

Now here in Wales, I have a garden with both my favourite cider apple trees and two colonies of bees. Do I wish I had started years ago? Of course I do but I cannot turn the clock back. I missed out on learning about bee keeping from my family but my granddaughters will grow up eating Morgan Sweets, hearing bees buzz in the garden, and Nain will tell them about their great, great, great grandfather, who kept bees in Scotland over a hundred years ago.



Bridget Newbury

## Why has this worker bee been marked?

One of my colonies, over a period of two to three weeks changed character dramatically. I was used to strolling amongst the hives without any armour just to see what they were taking in and to have a chat with them. I didn't bother them and they didn't bother me; a lovely amicable existence.



Gradually they became a little more aggressive until they were going for anyone who got within 25m of the apiary. There would be 20 to 50 of them all round my head screaming at my veil and stinging my gloves. It was impossible to source them as these nasties followed you down the row of hives such that every colony appeared to be the same. Although I had a rough idea which hive it was I was wary of taking the ultimate step in case I got it wrong.

I mark my queens so why not mark the workers? That evening I got an aerosol of fluorescent red paint from the workshop and after giving it good shake donned my armour again and waded into the fray. I waited until I had got a large crowd of bees going round and round and really going for me then stepped briskly back and sprayed a cloud of red paint into the air.

Next morning I opened the suspect hive and lo and behold, there was my evidence. The queen was promptly dispatched to the hive in the sky and a nucleus placed alongside for uniting the next day.

A great relief and hopefully it will be a happy ending.

Deryck Johnson courtesy Essex BeeKeepers and EBees July 2010

## Bees Abroad

Are you one of those people who just can't help volunteering for things, no matter how busy you are? Well, I'm one of those people! Fascinated by the talk that Pam Gregory gave to the MBKA a couple of years ago about Bees Abroad, when I heard about the volunteer day that Bees Abroad were holding this March at Stoneleigh Park, I just couldn't resist going along. Just as well, as it turned out, as I was the only person there from Wales (aside from Pam, of course). I also seemed to be the only person who didn't already have some connection with Africa, or with development projects, so I feared I might be a little out of my depth. But Bees Abroad needs help in lots of different areas, so I was reassured that there were things I could help with.

For those of you who didn't attend Pam's talk, or who haven't heard of Bees Abroad, they are a small UK-registered charity, dedicated to supporting beekeeping projects in developing countries. They send volunteer project managers to work with local community groups to develop beekeeping projects which will become self-sustainable. Using indigenous bees and techniques appropriate for each location, Bees Abroad offers training and support in beekeeping including making hives and protective clothing from local materials (we were shown photos of some very imaginative use of maize sacks, for example), managing bees, collecting and storing honey, and getting it to market. Bees Abroad advise on the production of honey and other saleable goods from the bi-products of beekeeping, together with marketing and business skills. Bees Abroad projects are normally self-sustaining after five years.

There were about 20 potential volunteers and several of the Bees Abroad project leaders at the volunteer day. It began with an introduction by John Home, the Chairman, who is also a project leader in Kenya, supported by his wife Mary who works with the women, helping them to make cosmetics and set up small rural businesses. Then we were given a lightning tour of what Bees Abroad does in the various countries where it operates – Pam Gregory spoke about her project in Malawi; Brian Durk showed us some hair raising photos of the route to his project in Cameroon, which made us realise quite how remote some of these projects are; and Claire Waring, in between organising a delicious lunch and the biggest mound of chocolate biscuits you've ever seen, showed us photos of their project in Nepal.

Next we divided up into workshop groups to discuss what is needed to make a project sustainable. My group consisted of Brian Durk, Ronald from Uganda, who works as an accountant in this country, knows nothing about beekeeping, but is already running a chicken-raising project in Uganda, Keith from Southport who intends to set up a beekeeping project in northern Cyprus, Sally from Shepperton who has been a beekeeper for 20 years and makes cosmetics (as I do), and me. Being such a disparate bunch of people, we came up with some varied and interesting ideas, then gave feedback to the rest of the group.

After lunch we were given a description of what Bees Abroad does in this country, by the aptly named Jeff Bee. He explained that they give talks, have stands at shows, do fundraising, sell bee-related items, Christmas cards etc. They need help in all these areas, especially in developing internet sales. What sounds the more glamorous side, though Claire assured us it was very hard work, is organising Bees Abroad holidays. She showed us photos of some of the holidays that she has organised – to Nepal to see the honey hunters in action, to Cameroon, Thailand, the Yucatan, Cambodia, Rumania and to Chile where there's a commercial operation harvesting active

honey (similar to manuka honey) which I believe is sold at Waitrose. After this we again broke up for workshop discussions about how to raise the profile of Bees Abroad in this country. How about running a marathon dressed as a fluffy bee??

So – whilst running a marathon might be beyond me - what am I going to do for Bees Abroad? Well, I've written this account for a start, which might generate some interest and possibly a response. I will volunteer to help at the Shrewsbury Flower Show. And, who knows, maybe I'll develop a line of beeswax & honey soaps especially for Bees Abroad. As a certain famous retailer is fond of saying, every little helps. Why don't you volunteer to help them too? Visit [www.beesabroad.org.uk](http://www.beesabroad.org.uk) to find out more.

Jane Frank ( Former Secretary MBKA)

## Additional role of the drone

A man was driving down the road and ran out of petrol. Just at that moment, a bee flew in his window.

The bee said, 'What seems to be the problem?'

'I'm out of petrol,' the man replied.

The bee told the man to wait right there and flew away. Minutes later, the man watched as an entire swarm of bees flew to his car and into his petrol tank. After a few minutes, the bees flew out.

'Try it now,' said one bee.

The man turned the ignition key and the car started right up. 'Wow!' the man exclaimed, 'what did you put in my tank?'

The bee answered



*(At last - I knew that I could eventually prove that drones were useful for something more than the obvious! - ED)*

Courtesy AN HES 'the swarm' & eBees

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# Leo Tolstoy - Bees, from War and Peace

*Leo Nikolayevich Tolstoy, 1828-1910, beekeeper, pacifist, writer, and philosopher, enjoyed beekeeping to such an extent that his wife sometimes worried about his sanity. She should have realized that he was engaged in research for a book.*

## War and Peace: Chapter 20

Meanwhile, Moscow was empty. There were still people in it, perhaps a fiftieth part of its former inhabitants had remained, but it was empty. It was empty in the sense that a dying queenless hive is empty.

In a queenless hive no life is left, though to a superficial glance it seems as much alive as other hives. The bees circle round a queenless hive in the hot beams of the midday sun as gaily as around the living hives; from a distance it smells of honey like the others, and bees fly in and out in the same way. But one has only to observe that hive to realize that there is no longer any life in it. The bees do not fly in the same way, the smell and the sound that meet the beekeeper are not the same.

To the beekeeper's tap on the wall of the sick hive, instead of the former instant unanimous humming of tens of thousands of bees with their abdomens threateningly compressed, and producing by the rapid vibration of their wings an aerial living sound, the only reply is a disconnected buzzing from different parts of the deserted hive. From the alighting board, instead of the former spirituous fragrant smell of honey and venom, and the warm whiffs of crowded life, comes an odour of emptiness and decay mingling with the smell of honey. There are no longer sentinels sounding the alarm with their abdomens raised, and ready to die in defence of the hive.

There is no longer the measured quiet sound of throbbing activity, like the sound of boiling water, but diverse discordant sounds of disorder. In and out of the hive long black robber bees smeared with honey fly timidly and shiftily. They do not sting, but crawl away from danger. Formerly only bees laden with honey flew into the hive, and they flew out empty; now they fly out laden. The beekeeper opens the lower part of the hive and peers in.

Instead of black, glossy bees- tamed by toil, clinging to one another's legs and drawing out the wax, with a ceaseless hum of labour - that used to hang in long clusters down to the floor of the hive, drowsy shrivelled bees crawl about separately in various directions on the floor and walls of the hive. Instead of a neatly glued floor, swept by the bees with the fanning of their wings, there is a floor littered with bits of wax, excrement, dying bees scarcely moving their legs, and dead ones that have not been cleared away

The beekeeper opens the upper part of the hive and examines the super. Instead of serried rows of bees sealing up every gap in the combs and keeping the brood warm, he sees the skilful complex structures of the combs, but no longer in their former state of purity. All is neglected and foul. Black robber bees are swiftly and stealthily prowling about the combs, and the short home bees, shrivelled and listless as if they were old, creep slowly about without trying to hinder the robbers, having lost all motive and all sense of life. Drones, bumblebees, wasps, and butterflies knock awkwardly against the walls of the hive in their flight. Here and there among the cells containing dead brood and honey an angry buzzing can sometimes be heard. Here and there a couple of bees, by force of habit and custom cleaning out the brood cells, with efforts beyond their strength

laboriously drag away a dead bee or bumblebee without knowing why they do it. In another corner two old bees are languidly fighting, or cleaning themselves, or feeding one another, without themselves knowing whether they do it with friendly or hostile intent. In a third place a crowd of bees, crushing one another, attack some victim and fight and smother it, and the victim, enfeebled or killed, drops from above slowly and lightly as a feather, among the heap of corpses.

The keeper opens the two centre partitions to examine the brood cells. In place of the former close dark circles formed by thousands of bees sitting back to back and guarding the high mystery of generation, he sees hundreds of dull, listless, and sleepy shells of bees. They have almost all died unawares, sitting in the sanctuary they had guarded and which is now no more. They reek of decay and death. Only a few of them still move, rise, and feebly fly to settle on the enemy's hand, lacking the spirit to die stinging him; the rest are dead and fall as lightly as fish scales. The beekeeper closes the hive, chalks a mark on it, and when he has time tears out its contents and burns it clean.

So in the same way Moscow was empty when Napoleon, weary, uneasy, and morose, paced up and down in front of the Kammer-Kollezski rampart, awaiting what to his mind was a necessary, if but formal, observance of the proprieties - a deputation.

Leo Tolstoy

***marcus aurelius***

" What is not good for the swarm is not  
good for the bee "

Aurelius, Med. vi. 54

Remember the beginning of the film Gladiator. The  
Russell Crow character loyally served an old emperor  
on the battle field. That was Marcus Aurelius.

## **Honey Bee Venom May Help Design New Treatments to Alleviate Muscular Dystrophy, Depression and Dementia**

Scientists researching a toxin extracted from the venom of the honey bee have used this to inform the design of new treatments to alleviate the symptoms of conditions such as muscular dystrophy, depression and dementia.

Apamin, a natural peptide toxin found in bee venom, is known for its ability to block a type of ion channel that enables a high-speed and selective flow of potassium ions out of nerves. The blocking of these channels in brain causes nerves to become hyperexcitable, producing improved learning that has implications for the treatment of dementia and depression. In addition, injection of apamin improves the symptoms experienced by sufferers of myotonic muscular dystrophy (MD).

Until now, the exact mechanism by which apamin acts was poorly understood. In a study published in the Journal of Biological Chemistry, two teams from the University of Bristol and the University of Liege in Belgium describe the results of their joint work on these KCa2 potassium ion channels, also called SK channels. Using computer models and a genetic approach, the researchers were able to pinpoint exactly where apamin binds to block the channel. To block ion channels, most

molecules act as a plug at their external mouth. Perhaps surprisingly, the researchers have discovered that apamin binds away from the channel pore, and causes the shape of the channel to change through an 'allosteric' mechanism, resulting in block.

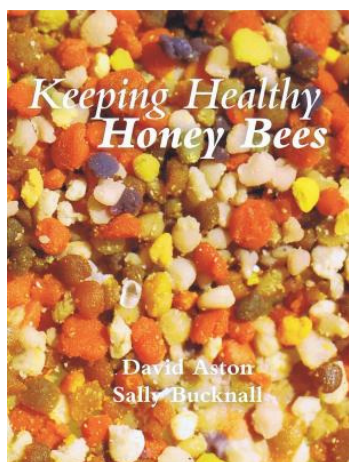
This discovery could accelerate research into the design of new SK channel blockers which could imitate the action of apamin, to target SK channels in neural and muscular conditions such as dementia, depression or MD.

Professor Neil Marrion, from the University of Bristol's Physiology & Pharmacology department, said: "Drug design depends on knowing the target. Our findings have provided a new approach to designing a therapeutic agent that could help with the treatment of a number of conditions."

Professor Vincent Seutin, from the GIGA Neurosciences at the University of Liège, commented on the study: "I am very enthusiastic about the results of our study and I believe that, with the help of this piece of information, the targeting of these channels for the development of future drugs has been made easier."

*ScienceDaily (July 10, 2010)*

Courtesy AN HES 'the swarm' and EBees



## Book Review

This is the title of a really excellent new book on all aspects of beekeeping. The difference in type-face on the front page is telling. Who would want to keep unhealthy honey bees? Or was the intention to suggest the link between the reader's health and honey bees: Keeping healthy....**honey bees**? There are other quirky things about this book: sudden blank pages that perhaps were intended for individual note-making and then perhaps not, because they are just as suddenly missing. But I quibble. The quirkiness probably comes from the production team rather than the superbly professional authors, David Aston, Vice Chair of the BBKA and Sally Bucknall, Chair of Garden Organic.

The book is very comprehensive in all aspects of beekeeping with everything explained in a relaxed easy-to-read style. It is

especially useful for having up-to-date information about bees and bee diseases and excellent advice on diseases under the umbrella of Integrated Bee Health Management. The colour pictures are superb, the black and white ones less so.; some really needed to be in colour for easy understanding. I was delighted to see at last a picture (in colour) of brood frames that should be destroyed. So often we see hives containing such frames and the beekeeper convinced that just because the cells are neat and regular, the frame is OK. There is a lot of learning to be had from this book with plenty to help the novice and enough to challenge the expert. I can thoroughly recommend " Keeping Healthy **Honey Bees** ".

Published by Northern Bee Books, paperback, 194 pages £16

Arthur Finlay

# Montgomeryshire Training Apiary

## Leasing bees and cutting risks

As at 17<sup>th</sup> July the following hives are inhabited with bees:-

- 2 National hives
- 1 Long frame hive (The type often used by commercial beekeepers )
- 1 WBC hive
- 2 Warré hives (designed by Abbé Émile Warré as a People's Hive (*Ruche Populaire*))
- 1 Top bar hive (modeled on the simple hives typically found in Africa and S.E.Asia)

The hives were bought by the MBKA or given by members. The colonies were from members or swarms reported by the general public.

Next year we will have survived a winter and ready to run the apiary both for the training of our members and as a public showcase for bees and beekeeping. The products of the apiary will be nucs and queens for MBKA members, and honey which will be sold at University of Wales outlets as “*Gregynog Honey*” (all profits naturally go to the MBKA).

The bees love the spectacular Rhododendrons at Gregynog but the honey from this source would be too toxic to sell commercially. So, whilst the Rhododendrons are in flower, the apiary will be managed for the production of Nucs and Queens and after the flowers have gone then we can put on fresh supers and go all out for honey production.

We have been slow at getting colonies into the hives. Hardly surprising at a time when even experienced beekeepers are reporting a slow start to the season and a shortage of bees. We are grateful for all those bees we have received. A leasing arrangement has naturally evolved whereby those giving colonies have said that they would like the option of taking back the bees should their own apiaries suffer catastrophic collapse. With SBI John Beavan inspecting the hives once a fortnight the apiary should do well. First in the queue for Nucs and queens will be those who have given colonies. Indeed those giving will have cut down the risk of losing bees by their “gift”. This is somewhat similar to the individual arrangements that some old beekeepers have with their novice friends: a Nuc is given one season with the stipulation that an equivalent number of full frames of brood can be taken back the next year. A good arrangement for all concerned which spreads the risk of losing colonies.

The only stipulation Gregynog have made is that all hives should be either new or of obvious good quality. The apiary is another attraction at Gregynog for drawing in the public. The more hives the apiary has, the more public interest there will be. Members wishing to donate or lease hives to the apiary should contact Dave or Jessica Bennett (see contact page 2)

### **To Visit the Apiary.**

Park in the car-park and go to Gregynog reception and show your MBKA membership card. You will be given a free car-park ticket. The Apiary is in the Dell. Signposts should be erected soon. Please give your comments to any committee member. We need your feedback.

**The next edition of the BeeHolder is in October 2010.**

**Copy for inclusion should be sent, via email, to the Editor by September 16<sup>th</sup>**



## Pictures anticlockwise from Top left.

MBKA apiary in preparation in bluebell clearing in woodland

Our MBKA sign where the entrance to the covered Viewing Shelter will be.

The hut where our equipment will be stored and extraction and other activities take place

The viewing rail with bee security netting one metre beyond

See articles Page 11 and 19

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