



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS  
ASSOCIATION**

# **The BeeHolder**

**Autumn 2023**



**Making up a NUC**

## Editorial

This issue begins with Mark Swain's detailed report of the year in our apiary at Gregynog. Further on Joy has written about hosting the WBKA General Husbandry Practical Session. You can also read Simon and Rachel's report on training. Jill has organised a superb series of talks at Plas Dolerw to take us through the winter and into spring. These were kicked off with Ben Guscott's talk on making mead and for many of us who attended, a chance to taste his range of meads.

See too the shows where our members took a stand to the delight of the public who could not only buy our honey and other products but received lots of information about honey bees and other pollinators. Two new members, Nicky Holmes and Roy Clements have put pen to paper. Nicky takes us through her first year as a beekeeper and Roy writes about the symbiotic nature of gardening and beekeeping.

Worryingly, Sian gives us an update on Asian Hornets and a full report on another Asian pest, *Tropilaelaps*, thankfully not here yet, but alarming all the same. Finally, Jill has given us a round-up of bees in the news gleaned from the press around the world.

**Carolle**

[www.montybees.org.uk](http://www.montybees.org.uk)

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# MBKA Apiary at Gregynog 2023

This year like the previous has seen challenges for the Apiary and the team which consist of Rachel Kellaway, Jill Hill, Joy Sisley, Chris Wyton, Brian Norris, Paul Barnes, Jill McAlloon, Simon Anderson and Mark Swain. This year has seen one further member joining the existing team, Rachel Buckley a new, keen bee keeper.

Over the winter maintenance had been undertaken including the repair and repainting of a number of hive stands and the locating of them on a solid slab base.

Joy is in charge of the Bee shed and has done a grand job maintaining an inventory and ensuring its kept tidy despite periodic visits from mice, while all members of the Apiary do their share of keeping it tidy and clean.



We entered the winter months with some trepidation due to the impact of the European Foul Brood (EFB) outbreak and the fact that we performed shook swarms so late in the season. The six colonies were fed to give them the best chance of survival. Initially it appeared that all six had survived the winter months in good state, but when inspected three of the colonies were weak. The colony which did not survive could possibly be attributed to the fact that it was the colony originally identified with the EFB virus. The Apiary was struggling, but was fortunate to have received three colonies, a NUC donated by Brian Norris and two colonies donated by Martin Hubbard (MBKA member).

As we moved into May desperately hoping for some signs of an improvement in the weather, the Apiary was visited by our local bee inspector Liz Childerley and given a clean bill of health. The Apiary team were preparing for another busy season of maintaining the Apiary and welcoming beginners and members to the weekend inspection sessions. This year's intake of beginners was larger than in the past,

and the weather was actually better at the weekends than the previous year, so more sessions were hosted. In addition to the sessions for beginners and members, the Apiary was utilised for a number of weekend sessions, for our members undertaking the Basic Bee Assessment and Bee Health qualifications. The Apiary on July 15th hosted the WBKA for a General Husbandry practical session, a donation was made to the MBKA for enabling this.

We extracted very little honey this year; some in June from the colonies donated by Martin Hubbard, and some in August. We have fed syrup to bees on a number of occasions during the late summer months due to a lack of stores, a fact reiterated by the WBKA in communications which they send out. The Apiary enters the winter period with twelve colonies, nine housed within national hives and three in polystyrene NUC boxes. Unfortunately the Warre and Kenyan Top Bar hives which lost their colonies after the EFB shook swarming procedure, haven't been stocked this year, we are hopeful for a more successful year in 2024 for these hives. Varroa treatment has been applied, with an additional treatment of oxalic acid planned for later in the year.



One final point I would like to raise before signing off is the need for everyone to be vigilant regarding their bee colonies. You may have noticed a number of items in the press regarding the theft of bees. During August 14 hives were stolen from an apiary near Llangollen, obviously by someone who knew when to take them and having the confidence to take that number of hives.

**Mark Swain**

## WBKA General Husbandry Training Day

The Association hosted a practical day for the BBKA General Husbandry course led by Lynfa Davies and Marin Anastasov at the Apiary in Gregynog on July 15th. Simon Anderson and Joy Sisley (from the Apiary team) attended along with some other 10 beekeepers around Wales. The rain held off for long enough for us to spend the morning in the Apiary under grey and threatening clouds with umbrellas at the ready. Marin demonstrated how to do a full diseases inspection on one of the NUCs, and we paired up to practice on the other colonies. One of the group volunteered to learn how to make up a nuc for sale within 24 hours. Fortunately, the bees at the Apiary are used to beginners learning practical skills of honeybee management, because hive 1 must have been open for another hour or more while the queen was found, suitable frames with enough brood, pollen and stores added and more nurse bees shaken into the NUC before returning everything to the hive, with barely a warning buzz or odour of bananas from the long suffering colony, and on the following week's inspection they were as placid as ever. We returned to the shelter of Gregynog Hall for lunch and the afternoon programme, which was just as well as the rain arrived with blustery wind, lightning and thunder.



It was an instructive day and Simon and I received a number of compliments on the Apiary at Gregynog. It also gave me the opportunity to appreciate the thorough progressive training programmes we run for beginners, improvers, and intermediate beekeepers in our Association as well as access to one off courses and practical training in the apiary for any of our members.

**Joy Sisley**

# **Training Update**

## **Beginner Beekeepers**

19 people completed the theory and practical training and have been awarded certificates. In all, 12 participants all of whom have bees, attended the Apiary Sessions. We initiated a knowledge checklist for participants to tick off and this had mixed reviews with some finding that it focussed their attention and others feeling under pressure.

## **Training 2024**

We have already had contact from a number of people that wish to undertake training next year. We would like to get dates organised as soon as possible, so that the website can be updated although payment won't be due until the New Year. All training will take place at Plas Dolerw, Newtown and the following dates have been agreed subject to confirmation. 4 February 2024 - Improvers, 24 February 2024 - Intermediates, 9 March 2024 - Beginners

## **Other Training and Exams**

Seven Association members took the BBKA Honeybee Health Exam and all passed. Two Association members took the WBKA Basic Assessment and both passed. Seven Association members are undertaking BBKA Module 3 exam in November. A study group is facilitated by Rachel at her house and the group are completing the Correspondence Course and past papers there. Eight members of the association have signed up to attend a study day on Bee Diseases, with an additional session on the Queen. This was to be held on Saturday to hold theory study sessions for the Honeybee Health exam and Basic Assessment Award at her house. This is likely to be a Sunday. Dates to be confirmed closer to the time.

**Rachel Kellaway and Simon Anderson**

## **Liquid Gold - A Taste of Mead**

Mead maker, Ben Guscott kicked off our winter season of talks at Plas Dolerw on Monday 18th September in great style. If your perception of mead is of a syrupy drink that is oversweet think again. Nor is Ben's meadery some quaint, wattle and daubed dwelling in the woods or Ben, for that matter, a man who has spent long years studying arcane subjects such as alchemy, although there is just a little bit of turning honey into liquid gold where mead is concerned.

Ben is a scientist and an artisan who, having gained a Ph.D. in biochemistry from Aston University and joined a team studying Alzheimer's disease. Being made redundant from an epidemiology job in 2017 Ben began exploring various artisanal subjects, one of which was alcohol. But when you begin tasting and analysing beer, cider and wine and realise that you have no interest in making them, your options are limited. Ben tried mead, he tasted it with a connoisseur's palette and a scientist's brain and decided that it had potential so he began experimenting and within three months he had a mead that he liked and, most importantly, his friends not only liked but were willing to buy from him.

By happy chance Aberystwyth University offered 'enterprise growth' space and by March 2018 Ben had installed 'Shire Meadery' and completed all the Government paperwork for producing alcohol. The alcohol in question is produced from honey, water and yeast, a process that is as old as the hills themselves. Ben talked us through the fermentation process which, for those avid to make their own mead, includes Ben's 'secret ingredient', marmite, essentially to add the necessary nitrogen for fermentation.

He then turned to the subject of honey itself and at this interesting point Ben turned to the rows of bottles in front of him and introduced us to the various meads he produces beginning with a basic but pleasant light mead made from Hilltop Honey before moving on to Cardigan Bay light, more complex in character as was the Welsh Valley



Wild Ferment, which as its name suggests was made from honey that had begun to ferment and, after killing the wild yeast, had undergone a second fermentation. We then tasted Borage mead and finally Ivy mead both of which could be termed dry. Ben described the ivy mead as 'a whiskey drinker's mead'. It was the colour of dark caramel and at 10.5% was also the most alcoholic of Ben's meads and the most popular. A wonderful way to round off a merry evening.

**Carolle Doyle**

## **MBKA evening meetings 2023/2024**

**Meetings are held at Plas Dolerw, Milford Road, Newtown SY16 2EH at 7pm. Tea, coffee and light refreshments are provided. Entry is free of charge.**

18th September - Shire Meadery - Benjamin Guscott

16th October - Bee Stings! - Russ Colman

20th November - Pollinators - Richard Dawson

18th December - The Importance of Drones - Lynfa Davies

22nd January - 'Any Questions' - answered by some of our experienced beekeepers

19th February - AGM - followed by Ann Thompson Head gardener at Gregynog

18th March - To be confirmed

22nd April Quiz, sampling our bee products and the honey show.

## Events Report - A Summer Success Story

This year the show season started with a trip to Guilsfield on the second Thursday in August. Luckily the forecasted rain held off and the show was well attended. It felt lovely to be putting up the 'dome' again amidst the hustle and bustle of other stall holders. Although quiet, sales were good, especially those of honey and our famous knitted bees.



MBKA President David Morris and Beeholder Editor Carolle Doyle at the Guilsfield Show

Always ready to volunteer at the shows. MBKA Committee members Mal, Jill M, Rachel and Jill H



The next show on the agenda was Berriew on the 26th August. The 'Show Gods' were smiling as this was a scorching hot day sandwiched between weeks of rain. Again, sales of both bee products and honey were good. Interestingly, there were fewer people wanting information on keeping bees this year and many more wanting to know what they could do to help the declining populations of other bees and pollinators. Luckily, we had plenty of the Welsh Government's publication 'Planting for Pollinators' to give away.

Newtown food festival was the first week in September and this was a huge success. The sun shone for the whole two days and we were very glad of the shade our dome provided. Our stand was especially busy on the Saturday when there was barely a chance to draw breath.



The opportunity to try on a children's bee suit proved to be especially popular and a great photo opportunity for Mums and Dads. We enjoyed chatting to beekeepers of long standing and those who were thinking about keeping bees for the first time. It was a real treat to talk with the photographer of many of the wonderful bee pictures on our display boards and one of the original team who set up the Association Apiary at Gregynog.

Our show season is over for this year and it was a big success. None of these events happen without the hard work and enthusiasm of a large number of volunteers, so a huge thank you to anybody who helped to make these shows a success. We are always looking for new people to join us, so if you would like to get involved next year, the committee would love to hear from you.



**Jill McAloon**

## Into Autumn

Our gardens are growing wilder, loosening up around the edges which is no bad thing where pollinators are concerned. Ivy will clamber up a suitable host, in my case an ancient Ty Bach that has all but disintegrated leaving an equally ancient ivy to become self-sufficient by forming a strong trunk before sending out branches heavy with flower. It is so beloved by pollinators of all kinds that the buzz can be heard from the gateway.



All in all, this evergreen native is a boon to honey bees with a multitude of nectar and pollen rich flowers from September through to November although if you plant an ivy now you must wait for a number of years before it grows past its juvenile stage with familiar five pointed leaves and matures with smooth oval leaves that show that it is ready to produce flowers. Better to encourage this native that can be found in odd corners of our gardens.

Mingling with grasses or forming part of a traditional herbaceous border, Rudbeckia 'Goldsturm' stands out from the crowd by its sheer flower power and in the world of the honey bee more is always better. This most unfussy of American daisies will flower on and on as, indeed will another stalwart of the autumn border Sedum spectabile. Its common name of stonecrop will give you a hint as to its preferred conditions. Give this fleshy leaved evergreen poor, stony ground and it will reward you with flat, nectar rich flowerheads on strong stems. A rich loam, most especially if enriched with fertiliser, will result in overlong, overheavy flowerheads that will flop to the ground.



**Carolle Doyle**



## Sym-Bee-Otic Relationship

Beekeeping and Gardening go together, at least in my mind. Pottering about, having a hands on approach, you pick up on things from nature that a weekly hive inspection alone may miss.

This is my first year of Beekeeping, I'm hoping the Bees accept me a little more than when we started. I have a Polytunnel near my hive and the odd one might get 'trapped' within, jumping on to a gloved hand I release them nearer the hive.

The more diverse your planting, be it: flowers, vegetables, herbs, ivy, fruit trees, or wild flowers, the Bees and friends will have more choice over possibly extended seasons, hopefully reducing the need for man-made feed a little.

My planting experiments, currently, very much have bias to encourage pollinators. Whether or not my Bees make use of them, or prefer going further afield is up to them. So in the months ahead I will be reading, planning, and ordering seed for 2024.



**Roy Clements**

## My new beekeeping journey

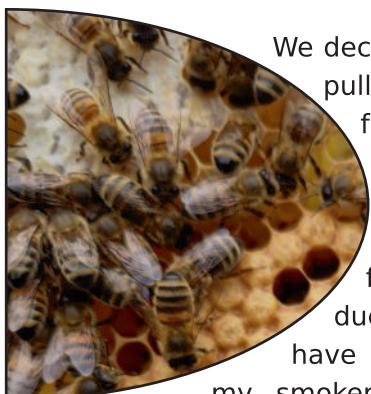
Hi. My name is Nicky and this year I became a beekeeper. We decided a few years ago that we might like to start keeping bees but the circumstances were never right. Last year however I found a hive next to my Christmas tree and my beekeeping journey began.

In January we purchased a beginners set which included another hive and all the things we needed to start our adventure such as a smoker, bee suit and other handy gadgets I painted my hives and spent many evenings on you-tube watching videos about frame building. I also purchased a few books to help me on my way. After speaking to some friends I found Monty bees and decided to join up and enrol on their beginners course. I honestly would have been lost without them and the course put me in good stead for what was about to happen!



My bees arrived in the early May Bank Holiday and we were off. Slightly apprehensive, I put my brave pants on and moved them into their new home. An unmarked queen meant I had to learn to spot her pretty sharpish but eventually I got there. Due to the fantastic weather we had in the spring, and all the hawthorn we were surrounded with, my colony grew very rapidly and this gave me a few more challenges, one of them being how to manage so many bees and how much room they needed. Rachel was always on hand for any newbie questions and visited me to help me along. To her I will always be grateful for the support and guidance she gave and still gives me.

I spent many hours sat on a bench just watching my bees fly and see what they were bringing in and out most days, just enjoying being around them and trying to spot anything strange happening. Then after one inspection with Rachel I went on swarm watch. My colony had grown to the stage they were building many queen cups and we thought we might have to split the hive! This was not my plan for my first year and I spent many a sleepless night wondering if my bees were going to disappear, 'what if I got it wrong,' 'what if they suddenly went downhill and I had a poor colony going into winter,' 'what if I split the hive and my queen upped and left anyway!' Then one day I went down and discovered that my bees were actually filling my supers with honey. I finally ended up with three supers on my hive and a brood and a half which I have been told is a wonderful achievement as my bees must be happy.



We decided as we had many capped frames we would pull some out and spin them. The look on my son's face was priceless as he helped us to spin them out and he has turned into a version of Winnie the Pooh ever since. We were so lucky to pull off what we did but I left the rest of the frames for my bees to have which they have needed due to the awfully wet summer we are having. I have learnt so much this year, mainly how to keep my smoker going long enough, and there is always something new to look at in my own hive.

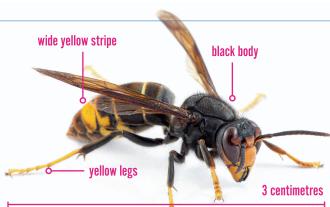
I will now spend time learning how to winter my bees and am very much looking forward to next spring to see them emerge with hopefully enough bees to start again. I will always be thankful to my husband for pushing me into this as I was always nervous about starting my bee journey. It is not easy, or cheap, those 'quick' inspections always turn into longer ones and just when you think you have enough kit you find something else you need!

**Nicky Holmes**

## The latest updates from NBU can be

In 2023 there have been 28 Asian hornet nests found in 25 locations in the South of England, mostly in Kent. Several nests including a secondary nest were found in Folkestone and nearby in Hawkinge. Other locations include Gravesend, Dover, Whitstable, Maidstone, Canterbury and Deal. A primary and a secondary nest were found in Plymouth and two nests were found in Portland, Dorset. All these nests have been either collected for analysis or destroyed. On the 14th of August the NBU located a nest in Newhaven, East Sussex. The NBU responded to a credible sighting of Asian hornet in Thamesmead, London on the 20th of August. A nest was located and has now been destroyed

The NBU has recently initiated active operations at sites in Folkestone, Dover and near Ashford. A new location in Plymouth is also being monitored as a result of a credible report. There is no further news on the unconfirmed but credible sighting of an Asian Hornet in the Bishops Castle area. The latest updates from NBU can be found at [www.nationalbeeunit.com/about-us/beekeeping-news/2023-asian-hornet-rolling-updates/tes](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/about-us/beekeeping-news/2023-asian-hornet-rolling-updates/tes) from NBU can be found at [www.nationalbeeunit.com/about-us/beekeeping-news/2023-asian-hornet-rolling-updates/](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/about-us/beekeeping-news/2023-asian-hornet-rolling-updates/)



## Spot Asian hornets and save our bees!



### REPORT THEM!

Use the 'Asian Hornet Watch' app  
[www.bbka.org.uk](http://www.bbka.org.uk)



The trustees have agreed a budget of £155,000 for a poster campaign on the back of buses in areas affected by Asian hornets. This advertising will roll out across Kent, Devon, Southampton and the New Forest from 25th September and it will last for four weeks. We need to know how successful this is. We would be grateful if you could please advise the BBKA when and where you see the advert by e-mailing [members@bbka.org.uk](mailto:members@bbka.org.uk)

## **Tropilaelaps: getting ready for a possible invasion**

I recently represented Monty Bees at the Bee Diseases Insurance AGM which was thankfully short and held via Zoom . Following the business, Maggie Gill, the regional bee inspector for Wales delivered a presentation on researching the detection of Tropilaelaps. This is another exotic pest which like the small hive beetle is very common elsewhere and thankfully absent from the UK but may enter the country at any time. The National Bee Unit has a number of sentinel hives dotted round the country especially near ports and airports to monitor any future incursion.

Maggie along with two other colleagues were sponsored by the BDI and FERA to visit Thailand to do some research into the best way to monitor the presence of Tropilaelaps in hives. She had some great slides including a video of Tropilaelaps and Varroa mites together. Both are small orange/brown insects, but the Tropilaelaps moves very rapidly compared to the Varroa and is smaller with a longer body. The bees in Thailand appeared to be very placid so Maggie and her colleagues were able to work with very little protective clothing. The team discovered that Tropilaelaps mites are very difficult to spot even in the bright Thai sunlight without veils, so would be even more difficult in UK conditions.

Before the visit, the team proposed to try out four ways of monitoring colonies for Tropilaelaps none of which were effective. Three further detection methods were tested in the laboratory using samples of 300 bees of which an icing sugar roll proved to be the most effective because the powdery sugar clogs the mites' legs and the bees are then able to knock them off by grooming. Finally it was discovered that mites do not survive on clothing, dead bees or comb so would not travel well, but can survive on larvae and newly emerged or adult bees.

Given the difficulty in detecting Tropilaelaps in the average apiary, let us hope it remains outside the UK.

**Sian Jones**

## Bees in the News

### **Pollination by honeybees produces lower quality seeds**

Research by ecologists at the University of California has demonstrated that honeybee pollination produces lower quality seeds than pollination by other pollinators. The researchers monitored flowers from white sage and *Phacelia distans*. When each flower was visited by a pollinator, a mesh bag was placed over the flower to prevent other visits and the type of pollinator recorded. Seeds from the flower were later collected and grown. Characteristics such as how many seeds successfully germinated and survived, and how much growth the seeds produced were recorded, to assess quality.

Flowers pollinated by honeybees produced about half the number of seeds compared to those produced by flowers pollinated by other insects. Honeybees also tended to visit twice as many flowers on one plant compared to visits by other pollinators. This probably results in pollen from one flower being transferred to another flower on the same plant, resulting in in-breeding and therefore lower quality seeds. Eventually, this could lead to a decline in native plant populations if the main pollinators in the area are honeybees. This study is an example of why the conservation of native bees and other pollinators is so important.

<https://www.sciencenews.org/article/flowers-pollinate-honeybees-low-seeds>

### **Honeybee and bumble bee flower patch fidelity**

Scientists from the US Dept of Agriculture Agricultural Research Service in Wisconsin have investigated the difference in flower patch fidelity between honeybees and bumble bees. They found that whereas both species favoured larger to smaller patches, honeybees were more likely to keep returning to an area of forage (76% patch fidelity) compared to bumble bees (47%). This difference is attributed to the differences in their social organisation and foraging strategies. Honeybees use the waggle dance to recruit other foragers to visit a favourable location, as well as trophallaxis (mouth to mouth food exchange) to communicate

the quality of a nectar source from a particular location, returning to a particular rewarding patch of flowers rather than investigating another patch which could be inferior results in less wastage of energy. Bumble bees do not exhibit the waggle dance to communicate to other bumble bees and rely mainly on individual acquisition of information. They tend to be more explorative when foraging resulting in lower patch fidelity.

It is proposed that the difference in patch fidelity behaviour between honeybees and bumble bees can affect crop pollination as pollination by the former could result in lower gene flow in plant populations.

<https://www.earth.com/news/honey-bees-are-very-loyal-to-their-flower-patches/>

## **How do honeybees make quick decisions?**

The brain of a honeybee is about the size of a sesame seed and contains fewer than a million neurons. Yet honeybees are able to use colour and smell to decide which flower is likely to yield nectar and which will not. Making this decision quickly prevents wasting energy. Scientists at Sheffield University trained a number of bees to recognise 5 different colours where blue was always associated with syrup, green was always “punished” with quinine (bitter taste) and other colours were sometimes associated with syrup but not consistently. The bees were filmed, exposed to different pairs of coloured discs in an artificial field. The response time and accuracy rate at which the bees made about which disc to visit showed a complex pattern of decision-making processes comparable to that of primates. Interestingly, the bees took less time (0.6 seconds) to make a correct decision than the wrong decision (1.2 seconds), opposite to what would be expected.

*HaDi MaBouDi et al. 2023. How honey bees make fast and accurate decisions. eLife 12: e86176; doi: 10.7554/eLife.86176*

**Jill Hill**

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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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