



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS  
ASSOCIATION**

# **The BeeHolder**



**World Bee Day School Visit**

## **Editorial**

Read Mark Swain's report on our apiary at Gregynog and you will see what a strong team we have to support members. As practical sessions get underway you will see how the Apiary is used for practical courses from beginners to advanced. Do look to at the profile of our training instructor, Rachel Kellaway who is the subject of this issue's 'in the frame'. I think you will understand just why we have such a full training programme.

Our Secretary, Jill Hill reports on the Welsh Beekeepers' Association Convention and has also taken the time to search out news stories on bees and their world.

Jill McAloon has listed those events where we shall be present with a stand to give out advice and information. Volunteers are always needed and always welcome.

To bee or not to bee? That is the poem courtesy of Roy Clements

The appearance of Asian hornets always needs to be noted and monitored as you will see. And finally, are you registered on BeeBase? There is a report from Sian on this database.

With the decision to drop from four to three issues a year, this is consequently the Spring-Summer issue.

**Carolle Doyle**

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

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It was with some trepidation that we entered the winter months with our colonies at the Apiary, 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 colonies had survived the winter months in a good state, but when inspected three of the colonies were weak in terms of size. Since the first inspection we have lost one colony, which possibly could be attributed to the fact that it was the colony originally identified with the EFB bacterium. Two of the other colonies remained weak and we have united them. The Apiary have been fortunate to have received three donated colonies, a NUC donated by Brian Norris, and two colonies donated by Martin Hubbard (MBKA member).

As we move into May desperately hoping for some signs of an improvement in the weather, the Apiary team which consists of Rachel Kellaway, Jill Hill, Joy Sisley, Chris Wyton, Brian Norris, Paul Barnes, Jill McAloon, Simon Anderson and Mark Swain, are getting ready for another busy year of maintaining the apiary and welcoming beginners and members to the weekend inspection sessions. Over the winter months some maintenance has been undertaken including repairing and repainting a number of the hive stands, and locating them on a solid slab base.

At the time of writing this update, we have hosted the first beginners practical session, this year has seen a large intake of beginners, and finally on Friday 5th May the Apiary was visited by our local bee inspector Liz Childerley and given a clean bill of health. The Apiary team wishes everyone a good years beekeeping.

**Mark Swain**

## Beginners Training

All theory training has been completed. The Beginner Group has also completed all of their practical training. The final numbers for the Beginner Group was 19 participants, and the majority of those have joined the Association, many joining with partners.

Thank you to everyone that helped support the training this year! Thanks too, to Nicky for writing up her experience below.

**Simon Anderson**



*Beginners inspecting a colony with Apiary team member Chris Wyton*

I joined Monty Bees with the intention of getting a hive or two this year and whilst exploring the web page I discovered that they run a beginners course over three sessions. I booked on and was not sure what to expect but I am so very glad that I did. The course was informative without being overwhelming and the practical sessions in the training apiary were superbly well run. It has given me the confidence I needed to start when my own bees arrived just recently. I would highly recommend this course to anyone looking to venture into the world of beekeeping.

**Nicky Holmes**

## Advanced Beekeeping at the Apiary

One of the frustrating, yet most exciting things about beekeeping is how often the best laid plans are turned on their heads. So it was on Saturday at the Apiary. Members who are taking their Honey Bee Health Assessment this summer arrived to help with a Bailey Comb Change on one of the hives which had been donated to the Apiary. This is a manipulation we are required to do for the assessment so it was going to provide some useful practical experience. The queen had already been separated by a queen excluder from emerging brood on 3 supers and short frames and was laying on newly drawn comb. The colony was bursting with bees when the Apiary acquired it and now it was even bigger. The aim of the next part of the manipulation was to reconfigure the hive so that the brood box with the queen and new brood were on the floor with supers above it. Except things didn't quite turn out that way.

On opening the hive, we found sealed queen cells; the colony was clearly preparing to swarm, except they couldn't because the queen was above the queen excluder, but hiding. What would you have done in this instance? We knew there was a marked queen there, and it was too late to do anything about the swarming instinct.



After carefully setting aside the frame with the queen cells we did an artificial swarm by shaking all the bees into a new brood box, making sure the queen wasn't left behind on any of the frames. Then we did a vertical split, with the 3 supers of emerging brood above the new brood box topped by another brood box containing one queen cell. What a stack!!

The hive next to it had also been donated and was in the process of being reconfigured from a mixture of brood on short and brood frames. This time we found the queen and several sealed queen cells on short frames. Given the size of the colony we couldn't pass up a golden opportunity to make an increase to replenish stocks at the Apiary. The queen was 'banked' in a nuc with enough sealed brood, nurse bees and stores. The brood box was left with eggs and very young brood to make emergency cells, and we made up two further nucs with the best sealed queen cells.



Several beginners who had been looking in another hive stayed to watch and ended up helping. What a day - and a spot of advanced beekeeping for the beginners!

**Joy Sisley**

### **Exam success**

Congratulations to Rachel Kellaway: Qualified Beekeepers Certificate, Intermediate Theory Certificate, Module 2 Honey Bee Products and Forage

Paul Barnes, Jill MacAloon, George McCulloch, Karen Mitchell, Laura, and Joy Sisley: BBKA Module 1 Honey Bee Management

## WBKA Spring Convention

This year's convention was a great success despite two of the four main speakers cancelling at short notice, the power-point system not working for Trisha Marlow, and the electrics playing up in the café!

I volunteered to be a steward and was on the reception desk to welcome people, check them in or take their payment, and give out programmes. It was a great way to catch up with beekeeping friends as they arrived and, as a steward, you get to enjoy the rest of the convention free of charge. The organiser, Events officer Jill Wheeler, always sets up a rest room for stewards furnished with hot drinks and lots of cakes!

Tim Maile gave the opening address, representing the Wax Chandlers' Guild which has recently given a generous donation to WBKA to promote education for beekeepers. Our Monty Bees good friend and master beekeeper Lynfa Davies ably replaced Pam Hunter followed by a very interesting talk by Giles Budge on Chronic Bee Paralysis Virus which included a video clip of bees affected by the virus showing the classic trembling on the top of frames.



*David and Frances Morris  
admiring the Bees Abroad poster*

After lunch, Trish Marlow showed us lots of pictures taken of beekeepers in Africa supported by Bees Abroad. Wally Shaw completed the programme, replacing Bob Smith, and described the co-evolution of honeybees and flowering plants in a very simple and clear way.



As usual, there was a comprehensive trade exhibition and despite my good intentions, I ended up spending more than I intended but it is just so tempting when you see all the gadgets, books, clothing, and kit on display!

**Jill Hill**

## Upcoming Events

Thursday 10th August - Guilsfield Show all day

Saturday 26 August Berriew Show

Saturday 2nd and Sunday 3rd September - Newtown Food Festival

**Jill McAloon**

## World Bee Day

On 21st May a team of six MBKA members took 'World Bee Day' to Gregynog. Our poster promised 'an afternoon of fun and information' with honey tasting, candle making, a visit to the apiary and a walk and talk in the gardens with an expert on pollinators and plants. We did too! Selling lots of plants, bee products and knitted bees into the bargain.

Joy Sisley, who had gathered together various honeys from members and supermarkets was busy as participants tasted the honey and then filled in tasting notes with, unsurprisingly, honey provided by our members winning hands down. Our events manager, Jill McAlloon seemed to be everywhere whilst our Secretary, Jill Hill, fitted out in a beekeeper's outfit talked about the national hive on display whilst our alternative beekeeper, Mal Shears talked about the top bar and warre hives on display with a traditional skep. In the meantime Rachel Kellaway took visitors down to the apiary itself.



I was busy turning children into bees by placing them in wooden hexagons, feeding them honey and completing the transformation by placing antenna on their heads. The 'bees' then cleaned their cells in true bee fashion before feeding other bees and marching up and down on the lookout for intruders. Finally they joined me in the waggle dance which, being humans not bees after all, became a giant conga. Still the conga gave them the direction of our gigantic paper flower and the distance too in twelve 'buzz' steps.



More fun of a scientific nature was provided by Richard Dawson, an entomologist who had brought along insect nets to capture and describe the varied pollinators at work. It was fascinating stuff, so fascinating that Richard has agreed to give a talk in the autumn. No doubt he will then elicit our help with the UK Pollinator Monitoring Scheme, POMS in short. For the curious it is a scheme to collect much needed data on the pollinator population. FIT Count is easy and everyone should do it so go [ukpoms.org.uk](http://ukpoms.org.uk) for more information.

**Carolle Doyle**



Mark Swain and Carolle Doyle visited Meifod school in the run-up to World Bee Day and talked about bees to pupils in their final year at primary school. Mark had taken along a hive to illustrate his talk and Carolle, dressed as a bee, 'turned' the pupils into bees by feeding them honey.

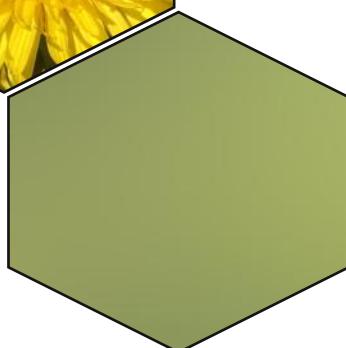
## Champion Weeds

I would make a good bet that if dandelions were as difficult to grow as, say Himalayan poppies, we would all want them. As it is, regardless of the R.H.S. designating them as 'champion plants' they are still regarded as noxious weeds. Those many petalled flowers in chrome yellow which are perfect landing pads for bees must surely put them into a different category for bee keepers although, truth to tell the verges are so thick with dandelions that no foraging bee has far to fly. Still, I champion them too for I have watched goldfinches feast on their seeds

I predict that many dandelions and other garden weeds will take pride of place at this year's R.H.S. Chelsea Show and I'm happy to say that I jumped on this particular band-wagon before the band had climbed aboard. But giving our natives room is one thing, preventing rampant natives like dandelions from taking over completely, is another. With deep roots and leaves that shade out grass they can fight for their place in your lawn which isn't always the case for more desireable natives.



I have learnt that lawns do not naturally turn into flowering meadows. They need help and a certain tough editing along the way. Broad paths that are frequently mowed through



the lawn are imperative and it is far better to buy plug plants than scatter seed. A native flower loved by bees and butterflies alike is *Cardamine pratensis* with the friendly nicknames of cuckoo flower and lady's smock. Pale lavender pink four petalled flowers inhabit damp meadows which gives you a clue to its requirements. Wild flower it may be but key in the name and you will come up with many sites selling this pretty perennial.



My own lawn is home to white clover which is beloved by honey bees and is a good choice if you want to mow regularly, just cut at the highest setting. If reseeding you can buy a 'clover lawn seed' mix with a ratio of 95% grass to 5% white clover.

I'd like to make a plea for another native, hawthorn which is the main component in field hedges and is the favourite honey of Chris May who was profiled in the last issue. If you have a hawthorn hedge do let it flower which it will if it isn't cut back hard as most hedges are. Hawthorn makes a handsome small tree too which is worth bearing in mind. It produces a fine crop of berries for the birds but is so often overlooked as a worthy garden plant.

**Carolle Doyle**

## Bees in the News

### More evidence that pesticides are bad news for honeybees

Researchers at the University of Arizona have been investigating the effect of two pesticides on the lifespan of honeybees. They collected bees as they emerged from cells and fed them with either pyriproxyfen or spirodiclofen, in varying quantities, and monitored them. Bees fed on the lowest dose of either pesticide survived for 25 days whereas those fed on the highest dose survived for only 17 days. Diminishing size of abdominal fat bodies is associated with ageing and the change from being nurse bees to foragers. Stress can accelerate this process. Further investigation showed that bees fed on pyriproxyfen became foragers at an earlier age than those fed with spirodiclofen. However, those fed on the latter had a faster loss of fat bodies and were noted to collecting pollen with a high fat content when they became foragers. It is proposed that affected bees compensate by favouring pollen with a high fat content.

### Hitching a ride: a swarm in a car

Transporting bees in the back of your car is always a potentially dodgy activity, with the thought of them escaping while you are driving being the stuff of nightmares! Not so in China. A story on Chinese social media recently describes a cool-headed driver who continued to use his car despite a swarm of bees settling above his head. Videos posted by a passenger in the back seat show that Yeo, the driver, far from being afraid, was happy to accommodate his unusual passengers. "I am going to be rich" he smiles. Apparently, in some areas of China it is believed that you will come into money if a bee visits your house.

The news item doesn't say how long the swarm stayed clustered in his car but one feels for the poor scout bees trying to keep up with the car!

## **Cheap honey imports in Afghanistan**

The issue of cheap imported honey is not just an issue in the UK. Afghanistan beekeepers have the same problem with honey imported from Iran. Although Afghanistan is self-sufficient for honey, Iranian imports cannot be banned because of Afghanistan's membership of the World Trade Organisation.

In the last 20 years, beekeeping has been encouraged as a way of lifting people out of poverty and providing an alternative to growing opium poppy. The United Nation's Food and Agriculture Organisation has provided training programmes, start-up kits, colonies of bees and protective clothing. The Taliban has continued to encourage beekeeping and recently announced the addition of another 400 beekeeping farms in Helmand region.

Unfortunately, the economic crisis caused by rising inflation and mass unemployment means people can now only afford basic essentials. Added to this is the import of cheap but poorer quality honey from Iran. A kg of Afghan honey used to sell for about 1,000 afghanis (\$11) but is now competing with Iranian honey selling at 150-400 afghanis (\$1.70-\$4.50) for the same weight. Beekeepers in Afghanistan have been left with a glut of honey they cannot sell.

## **A Robotic Honeycomb**

Scientists in Switzerland and Austria have developed a robotic system for observing and modifying behaviour of honeybees when they cluster in winter. Normally, it is difficult to observe the cluster as opening up the hive alters the temperature and therefore changes the bees' behaviour. The device looks like a frame of drawn comb and is placed inside the hive. Sensors within the device monitor activity but can also change the temperature within the hive to change behaviour. It is suggested it could be a tool to encourage the cluster to move to other areas of the hive during very cold weather to access stores and prevent isolation starvation.

**Jill Hill**

## **Bee, My Friend**

To Bee, or not to Bee  
That is our quest I beg thee  
Whether 'tis nobler in our mind  
To suffer the extinction of our friend

What dreams may come  
What nightmares so glum  
Environmental suicide begins  
Who will remember our sins

By soliloquy, aye, there's the rub  
Am I talking to myself, are we drub  
Or do others hear, no time to applause  
The time is now, rally to the cause

Mile upon mile of blessed monoculture  
Covers our piece of Eden, so vulgar  
We need a call to action, no need to cower  
The Bees need a wide variety of wild flower

They fight parasites, forever present  
They fight a poor environment  
They fight toxic chemical sprays  
We can and should help, let the Bees graze

After all Bee's pollinate much of our food crop  
We need them, beware the Fables of Aesop  
Their extinction would hasten ours, not funny  
What would Winnie do without his honey?

**Roy Clements**

# **News from the National Bee Unit**

## **Asian Hornet Update 2023**

There have been three Asian Hornets sightings reported in the UK so far this year. On 5th April the National Bee Unit received a credible triaged report of an Asian hornet discovered inside a French cauliflower within a weekly vegetable delivery in Northumberland, approx. The NBU responded to the report and a bee inspector collected the hornet later the same day for analysis. This was a single hornet incursion and follow up activities will take place to raise risk awareness with the producer/distributor/seller. On 13th April the National Bee Unit received a credible Asian hornet sighting from the Folkestone area, with accompanying photographs. The hornet flew off before it could be captured. The details from the report suggest this was a single hornet incursion. On 17th April the National Bee Unit received a credible Asian hornet sighting taken on the deck of a ferry from Poole to Cherbourg on 10th April 2023. Beekeepers in these areas and volunteer Asian hornet teams will be asked to maintain vigilance and monitor for Asian hornet.

## **2022 Hive Count**

Over 11,000 beekeepers updated their details on BeeBase during the 2022 hive count compared to almost 9,000 in 2021. There are currently more than 48,000 beekeepers registered on BeeBase and approximately 23% of those contacted updated their records. The 2022 hive count produced a figure of 288,311 colonies in the UK. This is slightly higher than the 2021 figure of 272,631

The Hive Count provides a very useful indication of the number of managed colonies in the UK and helps ensure that BeeBase records are kept up to date. Information about numbers and location of hives is very important for the National Bee Unit and Scottish Government inspectors in terms of preparing and planning for outbreaks of disease and exotic pests. Log-in to BeeBase at [www.nationalbeeunit.com/log-in/](http://www.nationalbeeunit.com/log-in/) to view and update your personal details, view or make changes to your apiaries, view your historic records and results and access e-learning.

**Sian Jones**

## In The Frame - Rachel Kellaway

Our Training Officer, Rachel Kellaway, thought back to her first encounter with bees at one of Oxford University's teacher training colleges. Rachel had entered the biology lab and on the wall, with a tunnel through the window, was an observation hive. She was hooked, although it would be 40 years before she acquired her first colony of bees given to her Rachel's late partner, Pete, at the very beginning of their relationship. Rachel went out and bought a smoker, hive tool and bee suit, laid them out on the grass and thought, what now?

The 'what now?' was a steep learning curve made even steeper by splitting the hive, but in making two colonies she discovered that the new queen was breeding aggressive bees. Rachel persevered with the colony until it superseded and life settled down. She had joined the MBKA shortly after accepting the colony and driven by an insatiable thirst for knowledge which is still very much part of her character she immersed herself in books including Haynes Bee Manual and all Wally Shaws booklets. Rachel also followed u-tube videos and visited the Gregynog Apiary whenever it was open and whenever Shropshire's Brian Goodwin came along to give the occasional class for new beekeepers.



On joining the committee in 2013 Rachel agreed to fill the position of training officer only to discover that there was nothing in place and so she started from scratch, meeting with Roger Stone and Bill Gough who were the apiary managers and with Roger Stone she ran the first

beginners theory training session in 2014. There's no doubt that it was daunting for someone who had only been keeping bees for three years but Rachel could call on her experience as a teacher so she drew up a lesson plan which is still the foundation of the current beginners course.

Training didn't stop there, for it was obvious to Rachel that keen students would want to improve and so an improvers course was drawn up followed by an intermediate course. To run such courses is one thing to acquire all the knowledge that results in becoming a fully qualified beekeeper together with the ability to convey the inner workings of the hive with all its attendant behaviour and disease problems and solutions is quite another.

I'm not sure if Rachel would have studied so intensely if she wasn't driven by always staying several steps ahead of her students, possibly she would for she is endlessly curious where bees are concerned. She now possesses a sheaf of certificates from BBKA courses taken and exams passed and is now working on BBKA module 7. The general husbandry exam involved two assessors spending nearly four hours at Rachel's apiary. Needless to say she passed for there was a time when she and Pete kept 30 colonies, mostly in out apiaries. In 2020 she downsized and now possesses six colonies.

2020 was also the year when the country entered lockdown, although Rachel managed to run all three courses, beginners, improvers and intermediate before the country was brought to a standstill. What is more, as bees are livestock it was possible for a team to be built up to manage the bees, a group that has become the 'apiary team' and with Rachel the apiary at Gregynog is now regularly open on Sundays for there is nothing quite like practical, hands on experience and Rachel has made sure of that.

**Carolle Doyle**

## MBKA Committee

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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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