



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS
ASSOCIATION**

The BeeHolder

Summer 2025



Flowery meadow

Editorial

Our members have been as busy as bees in and around Gregynog as you will discover in this issue. From planting primulas to celebrating World Bee Day on the lawns here. They have even met the Deputy Minister of the Welsh Government in the apiary and you can read about that and follow all that the Apiary Team have been engaged in.

If you didn't attend the First Aid Course, then you can follow a very instructive summary in words and pictures here. Jill Hill has also written a report on the WBKA annual convention.

You will also find a profile of the Hudsons who are well known for their championing of our native black bee, *Apis mellifera mellifera*.

Our Membership Secretary asked members the type of hives in their apiaries and the altitude of the site which she has collated and it makes interesting reading.

Carolle Doyle

www.montybees.org.uk

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National hives in cedar and pine

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Apiary Report

Colonies:

The colonies were inspected by the seasonal bee inspectors on May 7th. We had a clean bill of health for foulbroods. Colony 12 we discovered had chronic bee paralysis coming out of winter. We have been monitoring it but sadly it has dwindled to the point of no return and it has been destroyed. The inspectors gave us some more management ideas, e.g. 'scorch all the dead bees outside on the ground'. There was some varroa damage in another colony so that has been treated with oxalic acid vapourisation.

We have continued with training manipulations. The Bailey comb change is almost complete and has been a success. It has been carried out by the intermediate group.

We have made up nucs by splitting a colony giving it eggs and very young larvae and by grafting in a sealed queen cell. We are waiting for eggs to be laid.

Some colonies have been double brooded and this has been a good learning experience. Some of these have been vertically split with a split board. Again waiting for eggs to be laid by new queens. Colonies with charged queen cells had their queens banked in nuc boxes. Hopefully, all these manipulations mean that we have not had a swarm (yet) and we have nucs for sale.

We have the prospect of 15 queenright colonies. None of this could be achieved without the hard working apiary team and all the members who come to the apiary on a Sunday.

Maintenance:

On Sunday it was discovered that someone has climbed the fence after ripping the netting just to the right of the viewing shelter door as well as damage to the netting by the 5-bar gate. The damage will be repaired this week. Brambles trimmed. Oak seedlings being left a bit longer to enjoy.

Rachel Buckley Apiary Coordinator

Varroa control - a biotechnical method.

The amazing long run of good weather this spring brought with it large colonies of bees. Great for us beekeepers getting some spring honey but also great for varroa. This year there will be higher loads of varroa mite long before the summer honey crop is harvested and we can treat for varroa with the various treatments available that cannot be used when the honey supers are on.

At the association apiary we have put a short super frame in the brood boxes of the larger colonies. The bees have drawn drone brood comb under the bottom bars. Varroa prefer drone brood as it takes 3 days longer for the adult to emerge, giving varroa a longer time to ensure reproductive success.



After about 5 days from capping the pupa has pink eyes and this is a good time to cut off the drone brood from the short frame. Using an uncapping fork the drone brood can be raked out and varroa can be found and counted. It will give you a good idea of the varroa load in the colony, but most importantly a large number will be removed from the colony. The short frame can be replaced and the method used again. Alternatively, drone foundation can be used in the frame too.

Drones are also important so you have to be aware of not removing too many by checking that there is drone brood throughout the brood box.

Rachel Kellaway

World Bee Day Celebrated at Gregynog Hall



This year's World Bee Day was marked with our usual event at Gregynog Hall. The weather stayed bright throughout the day, although strong winds did cause some disruption. At one point, the dome tent lifted off the ground, but it was quickly secured with no lasting issues, other than the whole team feeling rather stunned!.

A steady stream of visitors passed through, many staying for at least half an hour to take in everything on offer. Jill H was extremely busy explaining the component parts of the virtual hive as well as updating people on the Asian Hornet. It was encouraging that most knew about the threat of the Asian hornet but had not appreciated that it was so much smaller than the European hornet.

Jane helped children perfect their candle rolling skills candle rolling proved and they were delighted to take home their own beeswax candles - a lovely memento of the day.



The blind Honey tasting was another highlight.

Joy, Rachel B and Tracey Van-Gent provided visitors with a variety of flavours of honey and many commented that they hadn't realised how different honeys could taste depending on their source.

The plant stall was particularly successful, with people keen to find options for attracting pollinators to their gardens. Many thanks to Tracy for supplying so many plants and helping visitors to decide which would be the best choice for their own garden

There was also strong interest in different styles of beekeeping, especially the top bar hive. Mal was on hand to answer the many questions about this particular type of hive, having plenty of first-hand experience. Many of the visitors followed up their visit to the stand with a walk to the observation hut, where they had the opportunity to see beekeeping in action. Simon and Rachel K combining beekeeping with showing and explaining to visitors what they could see on a frame.



Bees for Development
www.beesfordevelopment.org

Bees for Development drew considerable interest with their informative stand. Visitors were keen to learn more about their inspiring work how they can support sustainable beekeeping around the world.

And we cannot forget our very own "queen bee," Carrolle, who invited visitors (both children and adults!) to 'be a honeybee' and take part in a variety of bee activities including cleaning their cells, feeding each other and of course learning about the waggle dance.

Overall, it was a successful and very enjoyable day that helped raise awareness about bees and beekeeping, and encouraged people to think about how they can support pollinators in their own communities. A huge thankyou to everyone who helped, whether on or before the day. You know who you are!!

Jill McAloon

First Aid in the Apiary

Monty Bees is very fortunate to have a former army medic as one of its members. After leaving the army, Russ Colman ran a business teaching First Aid for many years, travelling all over the world. Russ is very generous with his time and on 12th April, ran a first aid course for some lucky Monty Bees members.



The course started with how to assess a casualty and implement the primary management using the acronym DRABC:

Danger- assess the situation and ensure it is safe for you to approach the casualty (an injured first aider is not very helpful!)

Response- is the casualty conscious, does he/she respond to voice or to painful stimuli (Russ showed us how to apply pain!)

Airway- is it clear (e.g. no dentures or food in the mouth), how to tilt the head back to ensure the tongue does not fall back and occlude the airway

Breathing- can air movement from the mouth be heard or felt? The rise and fall of the abdomen associated with breathing can be seen more clearly by placing a light object on the abdomen

Circulation- how to check for bleeding in someone in a beesuit

If the casualty is conscious or a relative is with them, Russ listed some of the useful information which can be collected while waiting for an ambulance to arrive e.g. whether this has happened before, existing medical conditions, usual medications, recent food and drink intake (or lack of), last time passed urine. This information can be passed onto the paramedics.

Russ demonstrated the recovery position and CPR, how to help someone who is choking, how to control bleeding in a variety of wounds, management of burns, how to use a defibrillator and Epipen, how to treat bee stings, and how to recognise and manage shock. Throughout the day, we were able to practice several of these techniques with a partner (with much laughter, as you can imagine), apart from CPR for which we used on resuscitation dolls.



The apiary can be potentially hazardous, from collapse from heatstroke while wearing beesuits on a hot day, to falls, to burns from smokers, to bee stings. This course gave us skills and confidence to support fellow beekeepers who become ill or have an accident, but first aid competence is a valuable skill for all situations and can save lives.

The very next day, Jill Hill was able to put her newly acquired first aid skills to use after Joy fell on her way to the Sunday apiary session! As you can see from the photo of Joy grinning, Jill didn't have to try out applying painful stimuli to see if she was conscious!

Jill Hill

Monty Bees Annual Lunch 2025

Sunday 27th April found 31 members of Monty Bees enjoying a delicious lunch at The Dragon in Montgomery. We had a great mix of beekeeping experience, from long-term beekeepers John Shearer, Eileen Williams, Wyn Richards and Marian Humphries to new members Amanda Farrington and Tim Rogers who are looking forward to getting some training and bees next year. Lunch included big portions of roast beef, salmon or vegetable wellington, followed by either apple crumble, cheesecake or crème brulee, accompanied by lots of chatting and friendship.



How High Do You Go? Hives and Altitude.

Sian Jones, our Treasurer and Members Secretary conducted a survey to discover what type of hives our members owned and the altitude of their apiaries. The results are below and they make interesting reading.

What type of hive do you use? 60 members answered with one member having three different types of hive. 75% who answered the question own National hives and the breakdown is as follows:

National 45, Polyhive 5, WBC 7, Top Bar 3, Log 1, Flow 1.

At what altitude do you keep your hives? 59 members answered with 68% keeping their hives between 101m and 300m. 22% keep them above 301m, and 10% keep them below 100m. The breakdown is as follows:

0-100m 6, 101-200m 19, 201-300m 21, 301-400m 9, 401-500m 4.

National hives were the most popular type for altitude. There are WBC at all heights above 100m but Polyhives are only below 300m whilst Top Bar and Log hives are all sited between 101 and 300m.

Sian Jones

Deputy First Minister of Wales visits Monty Bees Apiary

Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association is fortunate to have a training apiary in the grounds of Gregynog Hall in Tregynon, with car parking, toilets and a café for us to use.

Sadly, the hall and grounds have seen better days and needs extensive renovation work to keep it open. The recent appointment of passionate enthusiastic Chief Executive David Chell has livened things up and he has led a team to apply and win various grants for some of the work, including replacing the roof.

With relatively short notice, a small group from the Welsh government including the deputy first minister of Wales Ifor Huw Irranca-Davies, arranged a whirlwind visit to tour Gregynog. The apiary was included in the visit. It was a beautiful warm day so training officer Rachel Kellaway and Secretary Jill Hill were doing the first Spring inspection when the visitors arrived in the apiary viewing shelter.



It soon became clear that the deputy first minister knew a thing or two about honey bees! He is an ex-beekeeper who sadly had to give up beekeeping because his wife developed a severe allergy to bee stings. We invited him to join us in the apiary for old times' sakes but unfortunately, he didn't have time. Rachel and Jill like to think meeting us and our bees was the highlight of the tour for him!

Jill Hill

Primula planting at Gregynog

When our February evening meeting speaker Ann Thompson mentioned she had over 500 Primula plants to establish in the grounds of Gregynog, several members of the audience offered to help. Ann is the Head Gardener at Gregynog, home to the Monty Bees training apiary. I say “Head Gardener” - poor Ann is the only gardener, helped by a few volunteers on a Thursday morning. In its hey-day Gregynog employed 27 gardeners, so we all felt for her!



March 27th saw 8 of us turn up at Gregynog on a pleasant morning, including new members Amanda Farrington (who brought her son Jake along too) and John Loud. We then spent a couple of hours on our hands and knees digging holes and planting Primulas, but having a good natter together too. When we were finished, we enjoyed coffee and cake in the courtyard. It was good fun but I don't think we'll want to see a Primula again for a while!

Jill Hill

All about primulas

Primulas offer late spring to summer colour in a wide range of flower shapes and shades. Most are candelabra types, with a few exceptions, but all combine well with hostas, ferns and other plants that enjoy similar conditions. They are ideal streamside plants and thrive in cool, damp situations.

The Gregynog walled garden “weedathon”

After the success of the Primula planting session in the Spring, head gardener Ann Thompson found another “project” for a group of Monty Beekeeper volunteers - weeding the walled garden at Gregynog. How hard could this be, we thought?

The walled garden has had a chequered history over the last few decades, including being used to plant Christmas trees and raise pheasant poults. It is now derelict and absolutely crammed with large, well-established weeds! The wall has been repaired, and Ann had planted a few brave fruit trees, but otherwise it is in a pretty sorry state.



Eight of us set off at 9am on 26th June, armed with a variety of weeding tools. After 2 hours, we had cleared quite a bit but given the size of the garden, it was a drop in the ocean! However, Paula Huckfield had a great idea - she offered to lend Gregynog her 4 pigs. Ann has to complete some paperwork to enable this to happen, but we’re sure the pigs will make short work of all the foliage as well as manuring it (definitely something Monty Beekeepers didn’t offer!)

We completed the morning with coffee and cake provided by Gregynog café, which rounded off a fun but tiring morning.

Jill Hill

Gregynog Hall adds

We are working hard to restore all our gardens to their former splendour. So, if you are able to help in any way, or have memories of the gardens which you would like to share with us then please get in touch by emailing or calling Gregynog on 01686 650224.

Picture This - Pictorial Meadows



It's over 20 years since I saw my first 'Pictorial Meadows' and I almost caused a traffic accident because Shrewsbury Parks Department had sown this rainbow mix of annuals on a large traffic island and I stopped the car in amazement. It's probably why they haven't repeated the experiment.

'Pictorial Meadows' is the name given to several seed mixtures developed by Professor Nigel Dunnett of Sheffield University who was made famous by clothing the land around the Olympic stadium with his Pictorial Meadows mix. The name is deceptive because these aren't meadows at all for there is no grass to dilute their flower power but the effect, which is brilliant, is also meadow-like because the flowers are crammed so closely that they do look like a Victorian hay meadow before it was cut for hay. What we see in our mind's eye as a wild-flower meadow is generally wrong and if you must be purist about it, so are poppies and cornflowers, yellow marigolds and corncockles because they are all flowers of the cornfield which will not grow in grassland and only turn up when the plough turns the earth.

The pictorial meadow that so delighted me with its red and pink poppies, orange California poppies and cosmos in pretty pastels before turning to pure gold with the daisies of North America had needed a thorough preparation of the ground before I could think of sowing the seed. So, if you want to follow my example it is a good idea to decide on a site and begin to clear the ground before sowing next spring as I did.

The 'Classic Annual Mix' covered a crescent between the pond and the lawn beginning with poppies and ending with tickseed that lingered into late autumn. A year later I sowed the 'Pixie Annual Mix' all along the split-chestnut fence that divides the vegetable garden from the orchard and was rewarded with a long, long season with toadflax and cornflowers, California poppies and flax amongst many others.



Cosmos bipinnatus 'Dazzler'

It is the length of flowering and the density of bee friendly flowers that is so rewarding for here they are packed together just as pollinators prefer who will expend less energy collecting nectar and pollen from the rich carpet of flowers. They do, of course, grow very successfully in raised beds, troughs and big planters filled with compost which cuts out the necessity of clearing the ground.

You can easily find the entire range of Pictorial Meadows on line but the bulb specialist DeJager also sells them. Just send for the catalogue and you will also see several perennial mixes that may not be as floriferous as the annuals but will persist from year to year.

Carolle Doyle

The WBKA Annual Convention 2025

After a pleasant drive down to Builth Wells from Mid-Wales, I arrived at the venue to be greeted by people already heading to their cars loaded with newly purchased beekeeping equipment! Through the reception-free entry and no queuing for me as I had volunteered to be a steward later in the day, and straight to the room reserved for volunteers for tea and cakes provided by the Events team!

First on the programme was the opening address by Lynda Marston-Weston, Wax Chandler Master. She gave us a very interesting talk about the history of the Wax Chandlers, the regalia and the ceremonies associated with the Company. There are 113 Livery Companies in the City of London, with some still being added in modern times. Lynda looked very striking in her colourful ceremonial robe and pointed out how the colours and hexagon shaped patterns were bee-related.

Next up on the programme was the BDI sponsored lecture on “The science of varroa resistance” by Professor Stephen Martin. Stephen began by describing how poorer countries in the world (Latin America and Africa) could not afford to treat varroa, while Europe and North America treated, with China treating since the 1960s. After devastating colony losses initially, the poor countries which did not treat now have varroa resistant bees, whereas the countries which treated are still treating. Some areas in the USA are treating every 2 weeks!

Varroa resistant traits are now becoming widespread across the UK, with some colonies in North-West Wales that have not been treated for over 16 years. Case studies and information are available at www.varroaresistant.uk

Stephen described how the work of a Ph.D. student in Norway on hygienic behaviour in honeybees was the clue to varroa resistance. Bees uncap sealed cells containing varroa mites. The varroa mite escapes but as she can only reproduce 2 or 3 times, the process limits her reproductive capacity. He showed us the results of a queen swop

study which showed the queen is key to hygienic behaviour in a colony. He concluded with some advice about helping to develop varroa resistance if none of your colonies show resistant traits:

- Do not stop treating
- Collect swarms from long-lived unmanaged colonies
- Requeen from friends with local resistant bees
- Use locally adapted bees
- Keep looking, monitor, select and transition off treatments

Time for more coffee and cake in the peace of the volunteers' room then a walk around the comprehensive trade show to spend some money. I caught up with new WBKA Chair Selwyn Runnett and Vice Chair Paul Pearce, and beekeeping friends I'd made at other WBKA events as well as some Monty Bee members.

At midday, I took over the front desk to welcome arrivals and to check or sell tickets. The two hours flew past as there was a steady stream of people arriving, and going to and from the trade show, seeing people I knew and chatting with people I didn't. Back for more tea and cake before going to the final session of the day: Stephen Fleming presenting on "The magic and mystery of Drone Congregation Areas" (DCA). He described what equipment you need if you want to find your local DCA and the ideal conditions in which to search. He concluded by pondering on how the virgin queens and drones find the DCA: Earth's magnetism, light intensity, polarised light, thermals, pheromone trails, following others? Sadly, he didn't have the answer! Resisting more tea and cake, I was ready for home. The atmosphere at the Convention was friendly and busy, with lots to see and listen to, with an excellent programme. Roll on next year!

Jill Hill

In the Frame - Clive and Shân Hudson

Clive and Shân Hudson are members of the Lleyn & Eifionydd BKA living in the foothills of Snowdonia. They are well known for championing Treatment Free beekeeping having kept healthy colonies for sixteen seasons without treating for varroa mite, so I went along to listen to their story.



The house lies beneath a wooded hillside where they have lived for over 40 years and as they tell me 'bees came before children'. In 1985 they bought a nucleus of locally adapted bees from the bee inspector. Then, Clive tells me, they 'were led astray' when they imported an Italian queen which was fine but in the third season they found themselves with a colony of horrendously aggressive bees and with two toddlers, so worrying that they almost gave up. They didn't, restocking instead with locally adapted bees. Bees that they later discovered were identical to the free living bees that Shân had spotted on the edge of the garden. They followed the swarm into the wood behind the house and out of interest occasionally visited the nest all through the 1990s. It was an interest that became significant when varroa struck the apiary in 1997. Received wisdom was that without intervention all honey bees, whether in non-treated hives or in free living colonies would be wiped out but the colony in the wood was as healthy as ever and this got them thinking. Clive says that they were also observing many other free living healthy colonies in trees and buildings and the fact that they were not dying strongly influenced their decision not to treat their bees.

Sixteen seasons later there is little doubt that the apiary's honey bees can be called 'Varroa Resistant', a term for bees that have adapted to the threat of varroa by recognising the mites' odour. Consequently, some bees are dedicated to uncapping the brood and destroying any cells that contain varroa larvae whilst other bees follow on recapping any 'clean' cells. More information on this topic at <https://www.varroaresistant.uk/>. That the bees are the same or virtually similar to the black free-living bees may or may not be connected.

It's a connection that interested Paul Cross, a senior lecturer at Bangor University who sent Dylan Elen, a PhD Student along to carry out some research. Dylan spent two seasons working with the Hudsons' bees in an effort to prove the link and although this wasn't conclusive what was discovered through genetic testing was that the bees are almost pure *Apis mellifera mellifera*, the European dark bees, the bees that migrated here at the end of the last Ice Age and were, until the mid-19th Century the country's only honey bee.

It is significant because as Clive tells me, their bees share the characteristics that *Apis mellifera mellifera* is known for including frugality where their colonies don't require any extra feed, coming out of winter still with their own stores. The bees are up and about foraging earlier in the year and earlier in the day too which is an attribute belonging to black bees. The longevity of a queen is another quality that Clive talks about. He recalls one particular queen that was still successfully laying worker brood in her sixth season before a new queen was superseded. The two queens lived together for seven weeks, during which the old queen laid three solid frames of drone brood which Clive took as her legacy. It's a legacy that is important in an area where *Apis mellifera mellifera* still thrives thanks to the desire to keep the locally adapted bees that serve the Lleyn so well.

Carolle Doyle

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Please feel free to contact any member of the committee with any questions, or if you can volunteer time to help with any aspect of the association.

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