



**Montgomeryshire BeeKeepers
Association**

The BeeHolder

Winter 2020



New Stands for the Apiary

Note the special bee number code system

Editorial

The cover image this issue shows the splendid new hive stands which Ian made. Note that the stands are on stone supports rather than directly on the ground and that Ian thoughtfully fitted them with little black bootees (see detail right) to further protect against rot. Nice job, Ian, thank you.



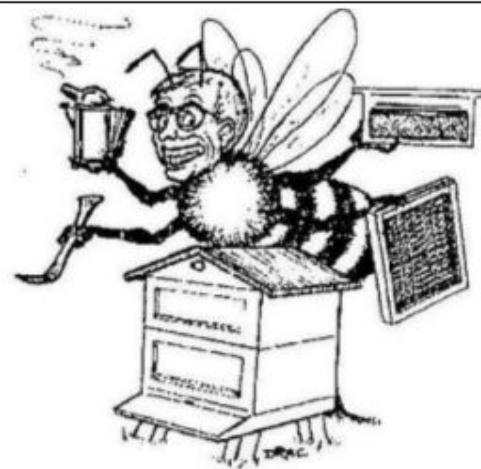
Some of you may not yet have heard of the recent and sudden passing of our chair, Pete. He was a great guy, steered our committee well and will be sadly missed. Further thoughts on page 4. Joy is standing in as chair until the committee elections at our next Annual General Meeting.

Many thanks to all who contributed to this issue - it is very much appreciated.

Chris

MBKA BeeHolder Publishing schedule

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Bad Limericks

A young man with awful strabismus
Put his first hive of bees on an isthmus
With his eyesight so poor
He would fall off the shore
But at least he had honey for Christmas

A beekeeper who lived in Devizes
Claimed to keep bees of two different sizes
Some were so small
They were not there at all
But the others were big, and won prizes (traditional)

Pete

For those of you who missed the email in September

It was with great sadness that we announced that Pete, our chair, died very suddenly on 4th September. Pete had been Chair of Monty Bees for the past 3 years and was a great asset to the Association. Despite being a very private man, he also managed to be a real character, with his distinctive hair and dry sense of humour! Pete was very keen that the MBKA apiary should be a valuable resource for all the Monty Bees' members no matter what their age or experience. He was not a man who had a lot of patience with red tape and once a decision had been made, he liked to get things done! He supported the apiary team to invest time and money in the bee equipment shed, hives and the visitor's observation hut. He was particularly keen that the latter should become more child friendly. Pete was always at functions and events to help with setting up and taking down and to welcome people. He was passionate about educating people, especially young children, about bees, beekeeping and pollinators in general. We shall miss him.

Jill



MBKA Retrospective 2020

(compiled and edited by Liz)

In the strangest and most anxious of times in recent history during the Covid-19 pandemic, our bees have continued to buzz. Back in March this year, all beekeepers were advised by DEFRA that despite the lockdown imposed nationally, the necessary journeys to tend their apiaries were permissible. In other words, when it came to bees and beekeeping – the show must go on.

Whilst, as an Association, we have not been able to come together for our usual 'open hive' visits, or our Winter Seminar series, the raffles, the stories of beekeeping daring-do, and apiary chit-chat – there has been a small core of members that have kept the show on the road by focussing

on our apiary and training.

With the retirement of Roger and Bill as our Apiary Managers, we had to find a different way of doing things with a new team – all during a difficult lockdown period. It was clear that, given the recent increase in interest in beekeeping, the value of the apiary was to be found in training new and existing beekeepers. It is so important for BKAs to be the custodians of instilling and sharing the skills and knowledge required to be able to keep bees responsibly and with welfare foremost.

So it was. With direction from our Training Officer, Rachel, a small team began the process of re-purposing the apiary to become a more focused training resource. We made it our aim to ensure that everything that happened inside the apiary fence was done with ‘best practice’ in mind. From biosecurity, to lighting a smoker to how to open up a hive – we strove to instil the best possible methods of doing things.

There was a need to replace many of the hive parts – long past their sell-by date – and Mark did an amazing job of cleaning and painting the remaining kit to ensure it has another 10 years of life. We are indebted to Ian who, with the help of others, erected a weather-proof awning on the side of the equipment shed. Ian also made shelves and new hive stands – a massive thank you goes to him for his support this year.

We hope that 2021 will prove to be the moment our members will come together and benefit from our efforts this year – there is a comprehensive training programme to be rolled out for Beginners, Improvers and Intermediate beekeepers too.

We look forward very much to sharing the apiary space with all our members in some way next year.

The MBKA Committee

Natural Beekeeping

The notion of sustainable beekeeping and more natural beekeeping practices continues to grow apace. Beekeepers are also becoming more aware, through the work of organisations such as BIBBA, of the benefits of native or near-native strains of honey bees adapted to local conditions. To support beekeepers who wish to manage their bees with this philosophy we have installed a horizontal top bar (Kenyan-style) hive and a vertical top bar Warré hive to the apiary this year. We hope to

demonstrate some of the many and varied approaches that are part of 'Natural' beekeeping in the future and welcome any members to get involved.

Mal

Events

The cancellation of shows this year has been unfortunate, but work has been ongoing to plan for 2021. Anne has been beavering away to create new additions to our stall and the inclusion of different types of hives in which bees can be kept (see above). The display boards are currently being updated, and text will go with each photograph, explaining what is happening. There will also be a section on plants that supply nectar and pollen, and a simple description of how these resources are collected by the bees, and what happens to it when taken back to the hive. A comprehensive plant list will be displayed for those who would like to make their gardens more attractive to pollinating insects.

Anne

Gregynog Apiary and Apiary Team

Our apiary at Gregynog has been established for 8+ years and has been a fabulous resource for the Association. Lockdown gave us a great opportunity to take stock and devote some time to breathing new life into the Apiary. Whilst mindful of Government coronavirus guidelines, we set about clearing the shed, tidying up the grounds, sifting through kit and generally evaluating the resources available to us.

We also carried out a full audit of the colonies, their strengths and weaknesses. In the Spring we did some Bailey Combs changes to freshen up comb and we dealt with colony behaviours as they were presented to us! At this point, we were also 'processing' our Beginners through their training on a one-to-one basis and preparing to open the Apiary to the wider membership on a Sunday.

Behind the scenes a lot of hard work has gone into creating best practice processes, and we were joined by several other volunteers to make up the '2020 Apiary Support Team' - tea, cake and a bit of Dunkirk spirit has got us through. The full apiary team was made up of Mark, Joy, Jill, Liz, Chris, Anne, and Rachel, our Training Officer.

We are always looking for new volunteers to join the Apiary Team, so if

you fancy supporting us, please do let Mark know and he can tell you what's involved.

Liz

Apiary Shed and Kit



Is it a shed or a tardis?

We started the year by taking stock of the kit and equipment we needed to deliver comprehensive training to all abilities. Much of the kit was tired and old, and needed a heavy dose of TLC or in some instances – it just needed to be put on the bonfire. Mark was an absolute star as he carted away brood bodies, supers, floors and lids – all came back sparkling clean and fit for another 10 years! Liz spent March and April cleaning things up and supplying new accessories for the shed, eventually handing the title of the 'keeper of the shed' to Joy - woe betide anyone that puts kit back in the wrong place!

Mark & Joy

Apiary Observatory

The observatory sits in the centre of our apiary and it's mesh netting walls give the general public, who might be strolling through the gardens of Gregynog, the opportunity view the bees up-close, in a safe manner. However, it needed a refresh!

And so Ferol is working towards replacing and refreshing the information board inside the observatory – it's really important we do as much as we can to educate the public about bees, pollinators and the role that beekeeping can play in the sustainable world. We get a lot of younger visitors in the observatory, so making the information 'child-friendly' has been a focus too.

Ferol

Beginners 2020



The anonymizing effect of the bee suit.
See if you can spot yourself.

flying colours. By forming a 'WhatsApp' Group and keeping beginners informed and updated by email, I believe we've created a new template for supporting all students in the first couple of years of beekeeping. Questions have been answered in double quick time on WhatsApp and the entire group benefits from seeing the information shared. Using technology in this way has proved to be a great hit.

With beekeeping continuing to be a 'trending' hobby, an MBKA Facebook campaign to advertise our training courses in 2021 has drawn over 40 interested people. We are doing our best to ensure that all beekeepers are aware of the realities and responsibilities that come with this extraordinary hobby before they sign up for training.

Liz

Training 2020

Roger and Rachel delivered an Improvers course at Plas Dolerw in February and the Beginners 1 in March. Because of the Covid lockdown and restrictions, practical training at the apiary had to be carried out around government guidelines.

The apiary was open every Sunday with hourly slots for training with the apiary team on a 1;1 basis initially for new beekeepers. Later in the year,

It's been a difficult yet marvellous year for Beginners Training this year. We had a total of 12 new beekeepers who opted to train with us. Given the transition of the Association Apiary to a more focused 'training' facility, it was a great joy to have this year's beginners around to 'stress test' our processes. Feedback has been excellent, and all graduated with

3 spotlight sessions were carried out on Varroa, feeding and winter preparation. These were well attended by members.

In addition, during the Spring of 2020, Liz and Rachel produced some short videos for 'Improvers' to help them through season two – again, the feedback was tremendous in terms of the usefulness of this means of sharing skills and knowledge. Perhaps we can continue to offer adaptable means of learning via the internet.

Rachel

Mentors

We have over 40 people on our waiting list for Beginners Training – an exceptional increase in interest. Obviously, not all will be able to attend as life takes its twists and turns in the Spring. However, we do like to ensure that all our beginners have access to a Mentor once they have completed their training and have bees. If you have the time to help a fellow beekeeper, at a distance or in person in 2021, please do let us know. It would be great to have your support and speaking from experience – mentoring and coaching a new beekeeper can be one of the most rewarding aspects of beekeeping.

We hope you've enjoyed this update and that you feel closer to understanding what has been happening within your Association this year. If you wish to get involved in any way – we welcome volunteers to step forward.

Liz

(Well done putting all of this together. Thank you, Chris)

The MBKA Committee would like to take this opportunity to thank you all for your continued support and wish you, your family and friends a very enjoyable festive season. We hope we can all meet again very soon.

Important AGM message

Because of the current rules on numbers of people who can meet indoors (as far as we can understand them), it is impracticable to hold the Annual General Meeting - or even have the annual meal - any time soon. At the last committee meeting it was decided to plan for a date in June 2021 should that be possible. We will keep you informed as the situation develops – possibly an outside meeting at the apiary if meeting indoors is not tenable.

editor

Bee-ing Pioneers

The Outdoor Learning programme, run by two specialist members of staff at Llanishen Fach Primary School in Cardiff, has been running for six years. Each year group from Reception to Year 6 has Outdoor Learning sessions each week, come rain or shine, in addition to curriculum-based lessons and maths-focused problem-solving



activities which also take place outdoors. The school has kept its own chickens for many years and pupils enjoy learning about hen health and welfare, reproduction and cooking with eggs.

For the past three and a half years the school has also kept an apiary with three beehives and is an active member of the local Cardiff, Vale & Valleys Beekeepers Association (CVVBKA). This is certainly not a step every school can take, but Llanishen Fach was already leading a collaboration between local primary and secondary schools to improve their grounds for pollinating insects as part of the nationwide Polli:Nation project.

The school had been in touch with the local beekeeping association to see if any members would like to site a hive in the grounds, but then a timely telephone call from Cardiff University offering a hive, equipment and training in exchange



for the promise of honey for testing by researchers in the School of Pharmacy allowed the school to establish its own apiary.

Safety is a major consideration when deciding to establish a school apiary. Realistically, simply keeping bees on site can increase the chances of staff and pupils being stung, but the British Beekeeping Association website offers a model risk assessment for schools thinking about keeping bees which can be adapted for a particular setting.

Adapted from an article by Emma Davies in Horizons, the magazine of The Institute for Outdoor Learning

The Threat of Urban Beekeeping

A paper from the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, warns that the craze for keeping bees in our cities may be backfiring. An excess of hives in parts of London means that here aren't enough flowers to keep all the honey bees in apiaries fed, the report warns, let alone support wild pollinators.

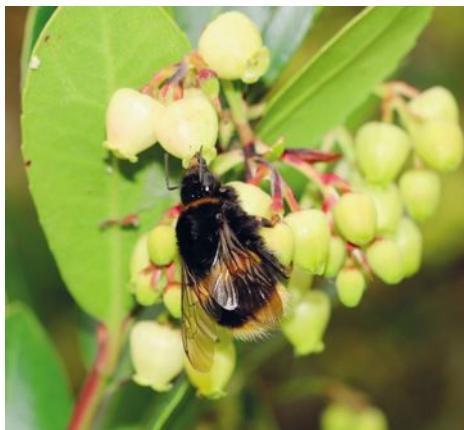
Such concentrations of hives can also spread diseases from the domesticated bees to wild populations.

"Beekeeping in cities is now becoming so

popular it's actually becoming unsustainable," said Professor Phil Stevenson, one of the Kew Gardens team. "There's insufficient nectar and pollen available to support the numbers of hives, let alone the wild species we have" going on to say that "honeybees are now outcompeting these other species for food they all need."

Although this problem can be eased by increased planting of suitable food sources in urban centres, more needs to be done to raise awareness of such unsustainable practices.

The Kew Gardens paper also called for campaigners to avoid issuing oversimplified conservation messages. Rather than focus on flagship animals to save, conservation groups should work harder to help the public understand how plants and animals interact and depend on each other, it said.



A suitably angry wild pollinator

Book review : are you game?

Considering the time of year, this issue I am reviewing a game rather than a book. It is aimed mainly at children, but the task of fitting the pieces into the grid is equally stimulating for the older person. The dice are only shaken once per round to position the worker bees, so after that even younger children can be left to puzzle away.

The Queen Bee is leading her worker bees in the construction of their new honeycomb and they need help! Roll the six dice to determine the locations of the worker bees. The challenge is then to fit all eleven of the coloured shapes around the bees, with no gaps, to complete the perfect honeycomb! There are 46,656 unique possible combinations in which the dice can fall and all of them have at least one possible solution. Some combinations will be easier to solve, some much harder. Bee Genius is a non-competitive game, devised to help children to develop their thinking skills. Every puzzle solved will help a child to build their skills and grow their self-confidence, plus the bee connection builds an awareness of bee keeping. The same company also makes logic/spatial puzzles aimed at adults.



Cyclist Downed by Bee

Following on from the swarm which caused play to be suspended at an international cricket match last year, Tour de France rider Lukas Pöstlberger was forced by a bee sting to the mouth to abandon the race with just two days to go. He suffered an allergic reaction to the sting, and for a short while struggled more than usually to pronounce his surname.



Lukas downed

Poetry Corner

A Box of Bees

Last year t'was wet
But I did get
A box of bees from Aber
I paid me loot
Put bees in boot
And drove back all a-jabber

Some weeks before I'd bought some hives
And cleaned them - got them ready
I found a spot and set them down
Made sure the hives stood steady

Three days went by and in they went
I put them in the hive
Three more days passed to bed them in
I hope they are still alive!!

The summer brought the flying bees
The pollen coming in
Between the rain and cloudy days
They worked their number thin

Now summer's gone and winds are chill
The hive is soundless, very still
But as we know when spring arrives
The bees look out and leave the hives
Selecting gaps between the showers
To fly off and seek the flowers

Dyn Derw (2012)

BeeHolder by email, anyone?

The BeeHolder in the printed form has long been a flagship for the Montgomeryshire Bee Keepers, and long may that continue. However as society moves more and more "on line", we offer the option of receiving it via email as a pdf file, the so called e-version. If you are interested in making the switch, please send an email to editor@montybees.org.uk

Things to do in the apiary

Rachel has thoughtfully put together a list of the things which we should be paying attention to during the off season whilst the bees are mostly quiet.

Tasks for December

- Heft the hive to check the amount of stores, you can put fondant on if the hive seems light.
- Monitor varroa and apply oxalic acid in vapour form.
- Check the entrance isn't blocked by dead bees.
- Consider doing some theory learning/reading.

Tasks for January and February

- Heft the hive to check the amount of stores, you can put fondant on if the hive seems light.
- Carry out oxalic acid vapourisation if not already done.
- Check the entrance for dead bees
- Check the mouse guards and straps
- Remove any snow blocking the entrance.
- Attend any Zoom or Webinar meetings
- Assess your bee suit and gloves
- Finally get round to that theory/reading you thought about last month!

Rachel

Can bumble bees be good gardeners?

Sometimes bumble bee queens emerge from hibernation too early for the flowering plants which provide them with vital pollen and nectar. But researchers in Switzerland have noticed a curious phenomenon. The hungry early bees cut holes in the plants' leaves. This caused the plant to flower almost twice as quickly as those without holes. Could bees be using this gardening technique to get their vital food supply?

At first, the researchers thought the insects might be feeding on fluid from the leaves, but the bees didn't stay long enough for this. Nor did they appear to be taking any part of the leaves back to their colonies. Another key observation was that bumble bees from colonies with less food were more avidly damaging the leaves.



A bumblebee actively not cutting a hole in a leaf

So the researchers set up an experiment with black mustard (*Brassica nigra*). Bumble bees that hadn't eaten any pollen for 3 days proceeded to nibble five to ten holes in each plant. On average, those plants flowered after 17 days, while plants that had not been exposed to bumble bees took 33 days. Tomato plants displayed a similar speeding up.

Hunger seems to be driving the bees: Another experiment showed that pollen-deprived bumble bees cut about four times as many holes as fully fed bees. When the researchers put potted plants and a colony of bees on a roof in early spring, before flowers were blooming, the bumble bees cut

holes in the leaves. But as spring progressed, making more pollen available, the bees made fewer new holes.

They further observed that man made holes, whilst they did promote earlier flowering, were consistently less effective than the bee holes.

As human gardeners, it is important we support our pollinating bees. You can make sure your growing space includes flowering plants which will feed them throughout the seasons - from early Spring to late autumn.

See gardenorganic.co.uk for the full story (and much more).

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A logo for BeeHiveMan featuring a stylized yellow bee with black stripes on its back and a small white horn-like feature on its head.

Training Plans 2021

Rachel has planned some training courses for the early part of next year, but whether the rules will change sufficiently to allow them to go ahead remains to be seen. It is certainly too early to assign dates.

New beekeepers training course

A three session program to introduce new beekeepers to the art. Cost £130.

Practical session with the apiary team at the Gregynog Apiary (2/3 hours)

- How to light a smoker, fuel and safety.
- How to make up a frame and about foundation.
- Suits, gloves and basic tool kit for the first year
- The wooden National hive.
- Siting an apiary

Theory session at Plas Dolerw (3 hours)

- Siting an apiary
- The colony of bees
- Records and record keeping
- Feeding
- Varroa
- Hygiene
- NBU and role of Inspectors
- The role of your mentor
- Books, periodicals, conventions, website and youtube

Practical beekeeping at the Gregynog apiary (2hours)

A first look in a colony of bees and the routine of kitting up, lighting a smoker and the use of the biosecurity footbath.

Improvers training course 2021

The improvers course is aimed at those bee keepers who are confident with the basics. It is arranged as two sessions on two separate days, and the cost is £100.

Theory - 3 hours at Plas Dolerw.

- Plans for the year
- Kit for the year
- Spring inspection
- Growth of a colony

- Swarming
- Queen problems
- Artificial swarm
- Chalk brood, sac brood, EFB, AFB, DWV Chronic bee paralysis

Practical - 3 hours at the apiary.

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

Intermediate training course

This is aimed at beekeepers with two or three years of experience. It consists of a combined theory and practical session at the Gregynog apiary (3 hours). Cost £50.

- Bailey comb exchange.
- Shook swarm
- Queen problems
- Finding the queen
- Disease inspection
- Brood diseases
- Adult bee diseases

Queen rearing course

Theory and practical at the apiary (£50)

This course needs a commitment to timings as certain procedures have to be carried out on designated days.

I am going to use the Miller method of raising queen cells in the first instance as it can be the way to start learning about planned queen rearing.

Dates and timings will be dependent on whatever Covid restrictions are in place.



Apiary Report

The apiary went into winter consisting of 10 colonies. No honey was harvested this year. After Joy's equipment inventory of the shed we found that we have sufficient equipment with only a few small items required for 2021. Earlier, Ian, assisted by Mark and Tony, fitted a new canopy protective cover to the shed. The hives are being checked and fondant is being added when they are identified as needing additional feeding. The last work at the apiary was 29th November : the levelling of some uneven ground and the planting of some snowdrop bulbs.

If you want to get involved with helping out at the apiary, do get in touch with a committee member!

Mark

bee informed, bee up to date, bee entertained
it must be
THE BEEKEEPERS QUARTERLY
available on line for £20 per year
<https://beekeepers.peacockmagazines.com/>

or £30 per year for paper copy from Northern Bee Books,
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<http://www.northernbeebooks.co.uk/>

BBwear offer

BBwear still offers our members 20% off all garments in their clothing range and 50% off BB10 and BB11 Gloves and Spats. Free gloves are NOT included with the full suits when purchased with association discount.

To see the range of products, their web site is <http://www.bbwear.co.uk/>.



A full spectrum of bee suits is available from BBwear

The MBKA Committee

Contact info deleted for privacy.

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.

For website input or issues, contact



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