



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS  
ASSOCIATION**

# **The BeeHolder**

**Winter 2021**



**The Apiary at Gregynog in Autumm**

## Editorial

Just a glance through our winter issue will show that MBKA members have been busy at the apiary and out and about with a stand and a new notice board filled with information on our work.

Read on and you will find plenty of opportunities to learn more about bee-keeping for Rachel Kellaway has drawn up a full programme for both beginners and improvers. You will also find information on the National Diploma in Bee-keeping.

Noel Eaton has written fondly about his memories of the late Roy Norris as he introduces the Roy Norris Legacy Award. This will be given annually at the AGM, nominations for which should be submitted to the secretary details of which can be found on page 9.

Amongst the features in this issue, which include a profile of commercial beekeeper, Will Denne and an amusing story with a sting in its tail, I would direct you to Mal Shears, who covers alternative beekeeping. Mal has written about an inspiring course that he attended in the Forest of Dean run by Bees for Development, a charity with global influence.

**Carolle**

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

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**BRIAN NORRIS BEEKEEPING**

**FOR ALL BEEKEEPING EQUIPMENT**

**AGENT FOR E.H. THORNES**

**National hives in cedar and pine**

**Little Garth, Garth Lane, Aberhafesp, SY16 3LN**

**Phone 01686 625250**

## MBKA Apiary at Gregynog in Winter

In November the bees were treated for varroa with oxalic acid vapouriser and checks have been made throughout the season with fondant being supplied when needed. This is a quiet time of year in the apiary although that doesn't mean to say that all work has ceased. The team has been busy mouse proofing the holes in the shed that had given rodents access to our stores and doing repairs to the bio-security foot bath to make it safe.



## MBKA Out and About

Despite Covid restrictions Monty Bees members were out and about at several events including the Pumpkin Festival in Llanidloes and on the 5th December our stand became part of the Christmas Fair at the Dyfi Osprey Project. This year's bumper honey harvest at the Apiary was very much appreciated by all those who bought jars of honey from our stands.



### A new information board in Llanidloes

The MBKA donated an information board to the Hanging Gardens Project in Llanidloes for its permanent exhibition of organisations and individuals working locally to address the decline in biodiversity. The Project has transformed a derelict site in the town centre where people and organisations can work together on practical solutions to build community resilience and well-being.

## Pumpkin Festival in Llanidloes



Committee member Kerry on the MBKA stall at the Pumpkin Festival in Llanidloes last October organised by the Hanging Garden Project. The Centre is also keen to sell honey and wax products from the apiary.



On 5th December, MBKA had a stand at Dyfi Osprey Project for the first Christmas Fair since Montgomeryshire Wildlife Trust opened their new Visitors Centre last year. We did very well, with a steady trickle of people looking for Christmas gifts and stocking fillers. With the addition of a few new items we hadn't featured before, I was pleased with how the table looked.



There was interest too from one or two enquiring about becoming a bee keeper. The staff at DOP are putting together a programme of events for this year, so hope to be invited again.

**Anne - Events Organiser**

# Training Programme 2022 at Gregynog

The following is my outline plan for training next year. Some of it does depend on Covid restrictions. I have tried to get as much done in the Apiary as possible, but there will be theory classes at Gregynog on a Saturday morning in the large room. I have booked the following dates at Gregynog.

Saturday 5th February 9.30 class of 2021 and 2020

Saturday 26th February 9.30 class of 2020

Saturday 12th March 9.30 beginners class of 2022

Saturday 26th March 9.30 Queen rearing for any member

## **New beekeepers £130 for full course**

One and a half hour practical sessions to be run by the apiary team at the Apiary in April.

- 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
- Hygiene and stings

A three hour theory session at Gregynog on Saturday 12th March beginning at 9.30 a.m.

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

A two hour practical beekeeping session in April with a first look in a colony and the routine of kitting up, lighting a smoker etc.



## **Improvers £100 for full course Saturday 5th February**

A three hour theory session at Gregynog

- Plans for the year
- Kit for the year
- Spring inspection
- Growth of a colony
- Swarming
- Queen problems
- Artificial swarm
- Making increase
- Chalk, sac brood, EFB, AFB. DWV Chronic bee paralysis

Two to three hour practical sessions at the apiary in April and May.

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

## **Intermediate £100 for full course Saturday 26th February**

Theory and practical session at the apiary (3 hours)

- Bailey comb exchange.
- Shook swarm
- Queen problems
- Finding the queen
- Disease inspection
- Splitting on swarm cells.

## **Queen rearing Saturday 26th March 9.30am**

Theory at Gregynog hall and practical at the apiary £100 for full course  
This course needs a commitment to timings as certain procedures have to be carried out on designated days.

I will use the Miller method of raising queen cells as it can be the easiest way to start learning about planned queen rearing.

**Rachel Kellaway Training Officer**

# **The Roy Norris Legacy Award**

Presented annually in recognition of outstanding contribution to the work of Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association and its members

I first met Roy Norris at a MBKA meeting nearly 20 years ago, shortly after deciding I'd like to learn how to keep bees. He had already been a beekeeper for about that many years by the time I started. It wasn't until a few years later when I joined the MBKA committee that I got to know him better. I think he had served on the committee in several capacities in the past but had been treasurer for many years.

I was struck by his level-headed approach and his calm logical way of seeing things, attributes which drew me to him. Our friendship grew and we both decided to join BiBBA, attending several courses to learn the black arts of queen-rearing. When I became ill in 2012, Roy was the only person who came forward and offered to help me with my bees. He virtually tended my bees single-handedly for 2 seasons and never missed a weekly inspection of my 14 colonies. As I grew stronger, we fell into the habit of helping each other with our bees. I learnt a lot from Roy. He liked to experiment with the latest techniques and equipment and was an avid reader and researcher. Our mutual support and friendship continued until his untimely death in 2019. He bequeathed his bees and equipment to me. It is with grateful thanks to his widow, Dr Pauline Norris, that I now keep most of my bees and equipment at her smallholding in Roy's apiary.

For all his 30 plus years as a beekeeper, and as an active and serving member of MBKA, WBKA, BBKA and BiBBA, he was a contributor, helper, and enabler. He was a mentor to many new beekeepers and as in my case, the sort of person who would step into the breach and offer to help in practical ways when needed. It is in view of his long-standing record of being active in furthering the interests of beekeeping, beekeepers, and in particular Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association, that I wanted to celebrate his legacy.



He was presented with a cast-iron bee ornament as a retirement gift from one of his many jobs and one day, Pauline showed it to me. That was the moment I knew I wanted to ensure that Roy Norris's legacy at Montgomeryshire Beekeepers Association must always be remembered, so this award came to be. It was funded from the sale of some of Roy's surplus equipment. I sourced an identical cast iron bee and with some technical help from Brian Norris (no relation to Roy I'm told), we made a wooden base and mounted the plaques and created a very handsome trophy.

My hope is that it will be awarded annually at the AGM. The award is to honour not just the man but his ethos and legacy of being the person who contributes and participates in a positive way to the work of MBKA and its members. I would ask that nominations be sought from the membership and then considered by the committee in advance of the AGM where it will be presented. I hope that any member, whether serving as an officer or just a lay member whose efforts have been recognised by others to have gone the extra mile to help or make some positive contribution will be eligible for the award.

It was first awarded in 2020 to Roger Stone in recognition of his work as manager of the MBKA apiary at Gregynog. Unfortunately, the formal presentation could not be made at the AGM as we could not get there due to severe flooding on the day.

It is a sturdy trophy and should give good service for another 30 years at least, just as Roy Norris did himself. I hope his legacy will endure.

**Noel Eaton**

Please send in your nomination for the Roy Norris Legacy Award by February 7th to [secretary@montybees.org.uk](mailto:secretary@montybees.org.uk) or to Canaan Chapel, Llanfair Caereinion, SY21 0DH. The award will be presented by Pauline Norris at the AGM on February 21st

# **Bees in the News**

## **Honey bees as pollinators: quantity not quality**

Research recently published in the American Journal of Botany has shown that honeybees are not so effective at pollinating plants as some other types of bees. Scientists compared the effectiveness of a single visit pollination by a wide range of pollinators including birds, butterflies, beetles, ants, moths, and wasps. However, the honeybee, though a less effective pollinator at an individual flower visit, remains an important pollinator because of the huge number of honeybees and therefore the frequency of visits to flowers. A case of quantity, rather than quality.

## **Another example of the resourcefulness of honeybees**

Honeybees appear to be better at living with the effects of a volcanic eruption than humans. The continuing eruption of the Cumbre Vieja volcano on the Canary Island of La Palma has resulted in the loss of thousands of homes and the displacement of about 7,000 people. Not so the honeybees! Beekeepers returning to their apiaries nearly 2 months after the volcano began its devastating activity, found that bees had sealed up the entrances to their hives with propolis and had used their stores of honey to prevent starvation. They had survived despite being covered by a thick layer of volcanic ash. Knowing bees take cleansing flights rather than defaecating in the hive leaves me with a vision of bees with crossed legs! At least the survival of their bees gives the 100 or so beekeepers on the island a little bit of good news.

## **A backward step in the use of neonicotinoids?**

The sugar beet industry is putting pressure on DEFRA to approve the use of thiamethoxam (also known as Cruiser SB). It claims this pesticide is needed to protect seeds from a disease known as virus yellows. Like all neonicotinoids, this insecticide binds to the receptors

in the central nervous system of insects resulting in paralysis and death. When applied to a crop, most of it ends up accumulating in the soil from where it is taken up by the roots of wildflowers endangering pollinators. It also passes into rivers and streams, potentially endangering the thousands of species of freshwater invertebrates living there. The use of this pesticide was banned by the EU in 2017 except in extreme circumstances. The UK government pledged to uphold the ban despite Brexit.

## **Sulfoxaflor ban in California**

A glimmer of light in the fight against pesticides. Sulfoxaflor is a pesticide which is similar to the class of neonicotinoids, with similar toxic effects on bees. Its use in California is no longer approved after a recent ruling by the Alameda County Superior Court. The president of the Pollinator Stewardship Council commented on the wide impact this decision will have on honeybees across the whole country as most commercial beekeepers move their bees to California for pollination services, particularly of almond orchards. The use of pesticides is one of the possible causes of the huge loss of bees to colony collapse disorder in USA.

## **Bees at Blenheim**

At the last count Filipe Salbany, an international expert on bee conservation, has located 50 wild honey bee colonies in Blenheim's ancient oak forest which lies within the 2500 hectare estate.

With the support of the Estate Filipe has begun observation work detailing his findings which include the discovery of a colony at least 200 years old. He has also observed that colonies are a quarter of the size of that of a colony in a beehive.

## BfD Sustainable Beekeeping Weekend Course

I had the pleasure of attending this course, held on-site at Ragman's Lane Farm in the Forest of Dean, in the September of 2021. For those that have not yet discovered them, Bees for Development (BfD) are a Monmouth-based charity with a global reach - promoting sustainable beekeeping and sharing beekeeping skills in some of the poorest communities in the world, with a view to creating reliable and sustainable incomes using local skills, materials, and importantly, local bees.

Training duties were shared by five BfD members who between them represented many decades of beekeeping experience - one of them alone having contributed forty years. The tutors exemplified the 'citizen scientist' attending to the body of beekeeping research, and contributing to it through their own practical experience. This very practical and hands-on approach is reflected in the organisation's patrons, which include Professor Tom Seeley, Board Director of the BfD North America team. Hive types featured on the course included the British National, the Skep, and frameless Top-Bar hives such as the Kenyan and the Warré. One benefit of such a global reach is the capacity it gives to provide the odd 'techy' detail such as European bees liking top-bar widths of 39mm, whereas African bees apparently prefer 32mm! The tutors however were at pains to point out that the course was "about bees - not boxes".



*Monica Barlow, BfD Policy Advisor introducing the horizontal top bar hive*

Content-wise, the course both covered the basics, which would suit the novice beekeeper, whilst at the same time providing much food for thought for the more experienced enthusiast. The line was apicentric - putting the bee's nature first - seeking to portray that honeybee health depends upon three key factors: the bees' own genetic adaption to their environment, the conduciveness of that environment (adequate and pesticide-free forage), and how they are kept (without stress, and with respect to their innate nature).



*Course members are introduced to the bees at the BfD apiary at Ragman's Lane (organic) Farm which includes National, Horizontal Top Bar and Warré hives*

People familiar with sustainable beekeeping philosophy will be unsurprised to hear that BfD regard the use of chemical treatments such as those intended to combat varroa as anathema. Besides their unwanted side effects, chemicals are seen as having no place within a beehive, restricting the super-organism's natural ability to respond and genetically adapt. Intensive farming-led practices of maximising the crop by 'forcing' the bees to invest in honey production at the expense of reproduction are similarly rejected, quoting Seeley's (1985, *Honey Bee Ecology*, p.18) observation that bees would have a higher genetic fitness if they were able to concentrate more on reproduction.

At no place is the divergence from mainstream orthodoxy sharper than in the area of swarm prevention. This is seen as a relatively new and unwelcome manipulation, that in order to maximise crop production

restricts the natural capacity of the bee population to mate freely and maximise its genetic potential for both local and seasonal adaption. Equally, swarming is seen as a beneficial component of varroa control in its creation of a varroa holiday through the swarm's inevitable brood gap. When the oft-quoted argument of the swarm's alleged unneighbourly and antisocial quality is raised it is met with the simple question "who do you know (apart from beekeepers, and possibly even those too) that have ever told you that they've seen a swarm?".

If the course could be criticised in any way it would probably be with regard to its sheer ambition. There were many subject headings to be covered and the tendency of participants to engage in enthusiastic discussion and experience-sharing often left one hungry for more at each session end. A three-day course in future perhaps - or would that just lead to more of the same?!



A pleasant aside was a honey tasting session. Four honeys were provided: a Welsh honey produced from the forage of many Summer blossoms; another Welsh thixotropic honey - monofloral, from heather moor foraging; a predominantly lime-blossom honey from the Czech Republic; and an exotic sample from the tropical forests of North West Zambia. Previously sceptical of there being much difference between varieties, tasting them side-by-side in that highly enjoyable way opened my taste buds to the fact that there were indeed as many variations in honey flavour as there were philosophies, attitudes and practices amongst beekeepers!

**Mal Shears**

## **Will Denne - the accidental bee farmer**

Will Denne's talk to the MBKA monthly meetings at Plas Dolerw in November last year gave an interesting insight to the life of a bee farmer at an altitude of 900 feet in the hills above Llanfyllin from the pressures of bureaucracy to the more rewarding aspects of environmental management and sustainability where his horticultural knowledge as a chief adviser to the Royal Horticultural Society for many years and owner of his own plant nursery in Kent has influenced his approach to hedgerow management, planting and forage for his apiaries.

Will's first contact with bees came about when his wife Bridget Neame left him in charge of her few hives during a 6-week visit to Canada. Confronted with a swarm from one of the colonies, he enlisted a bee keeper friend who lent him a suit and helped him collect and hive the swarm. A few weeks later another colony swarmed so he duly collected the swarm and it was only after the bees had crawled into the hive that, in a scene reminiscent of Bill Turnbull's introduction to bee-keeping he thought he should perhaps have done up the veil on his borrowed suit. He was fortunate the bees were more interested in swarming, because he later discovered he is seriously allergic to bee stings and has twice survived an anaphylactic shock. Since then he has undergone a course of desensitization treatment and of course, carries an EpiPen with him. But from then on he was seriously hooked.

In 2015 they sold their Garden Centre and moved up to Wales with their bees on one of the hottest days of the year. Keeping bees at 900 feet where the surrounding land is mostly grazed or sown with fast growing rye grass and ensuring there was enough forage for his apiaries, which have expanded to 52 colonies is a challenge. The extensive lawns around their new cottage, which were mowed to an inch of their lives by the previous owners have been left to grow and the once unimproved ancient meadow has flourished with wild flowers including some 710 butterfly orchids. Hedgerows surrounding the apiaries are trimmed following a 3-year cycle and now the uncut sides



of the hawthorn hedges are a riot of blossom in the spring and alive with the buzz of bees.



*Will in his apiary next to the extensive organic vegetable garden. He uses deep brood boxes in preference to the standard National brood box.*

Recently, Bridget and Will have established a community farm and nature reserve on 26 acres of sheep pasture. The renamed Dolydd Gobaith, or meadows of hope, is a community interest company that aims to regenerate the area and increase biodiversity by creating mixed habitats of woodland, meadow, wetlands and ponds. Will's energies have turned to more sustainable approaches to beekeeping. A national interest in honey bee conservation and an increase in the numbers of people keeping bees has created pressure on other species of bees by creating competition for forage. At a bumble bee survey training event run at Dolydd Gobaith last summer, they counted no less than 5 of the 24 species of bumble bee in the UK. Will aims to create a balance between *bombus* and *apis* by cutting back the number of hives in each apiary and reducing competition for forage.

The evening was rounded off with questions from the audience and an invitation to sample Will's honey vodka, made from steeping old comb in vodka. The process has the added benefit of cleaning the wax nicely says Will.

**Joy Sisley**

## Dates for your Diary 2022

Due to the concerns about Covid, and the experience of severe flooding that prevented many people getting to our last annual lunch last year, the committee has decided to move the annual lunch event to April. The risk of terrible weather should be lower then, and hopefully any potential lockdowns to control Covid numbers that may be put in place during winter will be lifted by springtime. Instead, our meeting in January is something which can easily be cancelled should the Covid situation bring in restrictions.

**February 21st** AGM at Plas Derw Milford Road, Newtown, SY16 2EH.  
7.00 p.m.

**March 21st** also at Plas Derw Shane Jones, SBI, will talk about showing honey. 7.00 p.m.

**March 26th** WBKA spring convention venue to be confirmed.

**April meeting:** to be confirmed but we're hoping to have a session about how to diagnose nosema and the use of a microscope.

**April 24th:** MBKA annual lunch. Venue to be confirmed.

## The National Diploma in Beekeeping

The National Diploma in Beekeeping (NDB) is running a 2 day Bee Behaviour course in Wrexham on the weekend of 19 & 20 February 2022. It will be delivered by Marin Anastasov and Lynfa Davies, both NDBs. Details may be found in the Eventbrite link below. WBKA encourages any of its members interested in this topic to consider enrolling for the course, and will support those who do enrol by reimbursing 25% of their course fee after they complete it. Please note that the NDB Short Courses are aimed at those beekeepers with some experience of the craft, not beginners or novices. The organisers will provide guidance to applicants as to the appropriateness of the course to their stage of beekeeping.

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/honey-bee-behaviour-north-wales-tickets-201575055417>

## Extracts from a new beekeeper's diary

I'd been thinking about keeping bees for a long time but finally took the plunge and learner courses duly attended I felt ready to start my bee-keeping journey and got my first delivery of a nucleus of bees on 4th June 2016.

By May 2017 I had the nastiest bees anyone could ever want. My partner Gill and I were constantly under attack. Once we were held hostage in our sun-lounge whilst a load of angry bees patrolled and frequently bashed against the door. One time I was nowhere near the hives and heard that sound, you know that sound, the sound of an angry bee making a 'bee-line' straight for your hair. Gill also came under attack on her ride-on mower which didn't have the speed to outpace the bees. Those bees were a nightmare and I was glad that they all swarmed off eventually.

I have recently learned that the pheromone that a bee deposits when it stings you smells like bananas or acetone ... well I don't use nail varnish so that's OK but I do like bananas. I think that from now on I will keep a stock of bananas in an airtight container at hand when I'm checking my bees so that if I do sense a bee attack coming on I will grab the container of bananas and chuck one as far as I can to take them off my scent

I put the behaviour of those nasty bees down to them being proud, native Welsh bees and I am English. Now before you poo-poo my theory let me tell you about the time my partner Gill and I went to an Open Hive event. All went well; we could smell the cake and tea and everyone was duly enthralled. We all set off to get changed out of our bee suits but as Gill and I stood near our car taking off our suits we heard some nearby buzzing, too near in fact. Gill by this time had her hood off and then the bees turned up. I quickly pulled her hood up to protect her not realising that I'd trapped a bee in there with Gill. There was no time to respond to her pleas for help as she did her version of The Waggle Dance because by then the bees had also taken a liking or

disliking to me. I was welly-less and had most of my suit off apart from one leg. I went to move away barefooted pulling my anorak over my head and ran blindly, dragging my suit behind me and unable to see I crashed into a prickly hedge. I stopped down the lane, over the brow of the hill so I couldn't see anybody coming to my rescue (it turns out that nobody was anyway) but more importantly I couldn't hear any bees either. I tentatively peered out from the protection of my anorak and, satisfied that I'd probably left the bees somewhere in the hedge, I slowly made my way back to the gathering. Apart from Gill everyone else was oblivious to our plights. We made our way towards the cake and tea by which time I had a thick lip and a hammock hanging from my throat. Gill on the other hand just had a bit of redness on her face (which got worse the next day so it served her right for laughing at me). The rest of the group were pleasantly chatting away, sipping their tea and chomping their cake whilst I slurped and dribbled my tea.



Now this hasn't put me off bee-keeping although I left it a couple of years before I got any more bees but this time I went for English ones. Yes I know, we should keep to native bees, and there's no doubt that I tried my best, but they just don't like me!! As it is, I got some Buckfast Bees which originated from someone that breeds them in Wales so that's near enough, isn't it?

**Elaine Smith**

# MBKA Committee

PRESIDENT	Jim Crudwell
INTERIM CHAIR	Joy Sisley chair@montybees.org.uk
TREASURER	Sian Jones treasurer@montybees.org.uk
SECRETARY	Jill Hill secretary@montybees.org.uk
MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY	Sian Jones membership@montybees.org.uk
EDITOR	Carolle Doyle editor@montybees.org.uk
EVENTS	Anne Wren equipment@montybees.org.uk
ALTERNATIVE BEEKEEPING	Mal Shears natural@montybees.org.uk
APIARY INFORMATION	Ferol Richards spare3@montybees.org.uk
APIARY CONTACT	Mark Swain apiary2@montybees.org.uk
TRAINING AND EXAMS	Rachel Kellaway training@montybees.org.uk
FACEBOOK	vacant facebook@montybees.org.uk
SWARM COORDINATION	Knighton/Newtown tel. 07814 993652 OR find a beekeeper near you on the WBKA swarm collection map: <a href="https://wbka.com/swarm-contact-map/">https://wbka.com/swarm-contact-map/</a>

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 David at [webadmin@montybees.org.uk](mailto:webadmin@montybees.org.uk)