



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS
ASSOCIATION**

The BeeHolder

Autumn 2012



The honey production line

Gregynog Apiary Training Day, September 2012

Contents

The honey production line.....	1
Editorial.....	2
Forthcoming Events.....	3
We Welcome as New Members.....	4
Chairman's Chat.....	4
Blue and green honey makes French beekeepers see red.....	5
Coloured Honey II.....	6
Phytophthora infestation at Gregynog.....	8
Gregynog Apiary Report.....	9
Toby's Top Tip.....	9
Bees in the post.....	10
A room with a view - the observation hut at Gregynog.....	10
Did you ever get a bee in your bonnet?.....	11
A Memorable Year.....	12
Reports on meetings.....	13
Bees in the News.....	13
General Wintering Advice.....	14
Vote of Thanks.....	16
Second hand equipment for sale.....	16
The Bee Inspectors.....	18
The MBKA Committee.....	19
The observation hut at Gregynog gets a slating.....	20

Editorial

Tony, our chairman, is often heard asking for contributions to The BeeHolder : either a meeting report (so that those who did not attend can get a feel for what went on) or a more general appeal for articles. Generally we get some take up on this and it helps to spread the “ownership” of the magazine more generally across the membership. There are some excellent articles in this issue contributed by members, “Bees in the News” by Michelle Boudin and “A Memorable Year” by Ann Hooper and “Phytophthora infestation at Gregynog” by Arthur Finlay. So if you have ever felt an urge to put pen to paper (or finger to keyboard, nowadays), why not start off with something about bees to share with us all. I don't mind typing up hand written work, if it is the “nowadays” that is putting you off!

Chris Leech



Forthcoming Events

October 17th

Wednesday 7pm

Meeting - What is happening to our Queens?

to be given by Dinah Sweet

Plas Dolerw, Newtown

Please note the change of subject. Dinah heard about the trouble many of us in the MBKA are having with our queens and thought that she could talk about queens rather than the advertised Swarm Control. Dinah is President of the Welsh Beekeepers Association, an examiner for various Beekeeping Exams and is the only Welsh Judge at the National Honey Show (Mead section) . She is reputed to make a pretty mean mead.

October 25th – 27th The National Honey Show

Thurs, Fri, Sat

see <http://www.honeyshow.co.uk/> for details

St George's College, Weybridge, Surrey

November 10th

Wednesday 7pm

Meeting - What being a blind beekeeper teaches us.

to be given by Rebecca Blaevoet

Plas Dolerw, Newtown

Rebecca is Wales' only blind beekeeper (as opposed to beekeepers who became blind). Her local association were unwilling to teach her beekeeping and finally relented when she said she had persuaded her husband to come along to the training sessions as well. Rebecca had to learn to handle the bees without gloves and purely by touch, sounds and smell. Her struggle to learn the craft will give us many insights about how we handle our own bees and recognise their problems.

For the latest information, check the website www.montybees.org.uk

We Welcome as New Members...

Annette Batty [Llanfair Caereinion], Paul Fleming [Welshpool], Tara Squibb [Welshpool] and Jonathan McIntyre [Caersws].

Note that, to protect the innocent, the place names given are the post town rather than anything more precise.

Chairman's Chat

I'm glad Dave Bennett asked me to help out at the Apiary Training Session on September 30th. Some of his regular helpers could not turn up and he was short of group leaders to open the hives. Graham Winchester was another stand-in mentor that day. We both thoroughly enjoyed the experience. However we do need more experienced beekeepers to sign up with David to be on-call to help out with the novices.

Mentoring helps one to get ones own beekeeping in perspective and encourages (I should say "forces") one to reappraise how one handles one own bees. Both Graham and myself were fascinated that so many were experiencing the same difficulties as we were in our own apiaries; queens going off lay, super frames full but uncapped for prolonged periods and unexpected swarming. In the September



inspection many of the hives at Gregynog seemed queenless, no brood, no eggs, couldn't see the queen but they were nice and calm and from the behaviour I would have guessed queenright. Just from the numbers of bees I would have said they were healthy colonies. In some of the hives the queen was seen sometimes with health brood sometimes with no brood nor eggs. In a normal late September I would have united a suspected queenless hive with an obvious queen-right one. But this year, the most peculiar in my 12 years of beekeeping and, I'm told, the worst in the last 30 years, well I'm risking doing nothing; not uniting unless the colony is obviously weak. Beekeeping is about weighing up risks. That is usually easy but this season there is no clear-cut solution to a hive without brood and eggs. I have had 4 hives this

year that have gone up to 8 weeks without any signs of brood or eggs. Putting in a test frame with eggs has merely resulted in healthy capped brood without any production of queen cells. I can repeat the test with the same results. So I have held my nerve and not succumbed to the temptation to add a spare queen or united with a queen-right colony. And sure enough suddenly the queen is in lay and I see her marked and frisky. To those who phone worried (or even complaining) about queenlessness I have been saying that they should hold their nerve for a few weeks. In most cases this has been sound advice and the queens have come back in lay.

Do come to the talk by Dinah Sweet about queens. As an expert from South Wales she will be able to give some dispassionate comments on a very worrying situation.

All is not worry and doom. Our scheme for introducing locally produced quite bees seems to have been a great success. In all 35 Nucs were sold. I'm pleased to say that most purchasers had been to Brian Goodwin's introduction course. And whether novice or experienced beekeepers, most expressed extreme satisfaction with the nucs. 6 frames in the nuc were guaranteed, some had 7 some 8 and one lucky person got 9 frames in his nuc. We had recommended that each person should buy two nucs. Most did not take that advice but wished they had. Certainly for those of us who give advice over the 'phone it is easier if a novice has two hives. One can then ask the difference between hive A and B and come to some deduction about what is happening. A test frame of eggs cannot be introduced if there is not a second hive close by!

Just one thing before I sign off....will you please NOT phone me during EastEnders, have some respect for this cultural icon.

Tony Shaw, Chairman MBKA, July 2012

Blue and green honey makes French beekeepers see red

(Reuters) - Bees at a cluster of apiaries in northeastern France have been producing honey in mysterious shades of blue and green, alarming their keepers who now believe residue from containers of M&M's candy processed at a nearby biogas plant is the cause.

Since August, beekeepers around the town of Ribeauville in the region of Alsace have seen bees returning to their hives carrying unidentified colourful substances that have turned their honey unnatural shades. Note that there are 2,400 beekeepers in the town, keepers who tend to more than 35,000 bee colonies.

Mystified, the beekeepers embarked on an investigation and discovered that a biogas plant 4

km (2.5 miles) away has been processing waste from a Mars plant producing M&M's, bite-sized candies in bright red, blue, green, yellow and brown shells.

Asked about the issue, Mars had no immediate comment.

The unsellable honey is a new headache for around a dozen affected beekeepers already dealing with high bee mortality rates and dwindling honey supplies following a harsh winter, said Alain Friehe, president of the apiculturists' union.

Agrivalor, the company operating the biogas plant, said it had tried to address the problem after being notified of it by the beekeepers. "We discovered the problem at the same time they did. We quickly put in place a procedure to stop it," Philippe Meinrad, co-manager of Agrivalor, told Reuters. He said the company had cleaned its containers and incoming waste would now be stored in a covered hall. Mars operates a chocolate factory near Strasbourg, around 100 km (62 miles) away from the affected apiaries.

As for the M&M's-infused honey, union head Friehe said it might taste like honey, but there the comparison stopped. "For me, it's not honey. It's not sellable."

Chris Leech

(adapted from a Reuters article)

Coloured Honey II

When I first started I asked myself the question "Where does the sugar syrup end up, as we all like to think of our honey as being pure?".

I did an experiment with one of my hives, a single National brood box, by adding a blue food colouring to the winter feed. Come spring I supered in the normal way. I had only one drawn super for this hive, so when that super was filling up I placed a new super of foundation under the first super above the brood box, the next super, still foundation was again supered below the other two supers, above the brood box, and the final two supers went on top. I eventually ended up running this hive on brood and a half as it was a large colony.

Several interesting things showed up which changed the way I keep bees,

1. I don't think the colouring affected the colony, they drew out four supers of foundation and filled five supers in total in the season.

2. Most interesting, the blue coloured syrup made it into the first three supers. The first super I put on (ending up as the third super by the end of the season) having the strongest colouration, mainly in the middle of the super fading to the edges.

3. The comb itself in the center of the three supers was blue in colour, what I don't know is weather or not the bees were producing blue comb or the wax absorbed the colouring.

4. Controversial, maybe, but I have now come to the conclusion that at least some of the honey we produce will have a certain amount of sugar syrup in! Makes you think though.

Since then, I have bought from Thornes a pH tester which tells me roughly how pure my honey is as sugar and honey have a very different and measurable pH.

Also I now leave a full super on each hive for winter (removing the queen excluder), and feed syrup as little as possible. I just keep an extra hive to offset the honey left on for the bees.

BBKA FORUM ENZO 2010 27th march



(Reproduced courtesy of The Essex Beekeeper and BEES)

Phytophthora infestation at Gregynog

Phytophthora ramorum is a serious fungus-like pathogen especially devastating to Oak trees in Europe and the USA. It was spotted on three trees on the Gregynog Estate. Remarkably, as few as ten outbreaks have been reported in the whole of Wales. This is probably because this serious disease has either not been noticed or not been fully reported. It is to the credit of the management on the Gregynog Estate that their infestation was spotted, reported and the trees disposed of according to Forestry Commission and other expert advice.



Trees affected by Phytophthora

Phytophthora also infects a number of other woody species especially Rhododendrons. Rhododendrons are considered a carrier for the disease and Gregynog are following expert advice in undertaking a programme of removing all the “non-ornamental” Rhododendrons from the Estate. Hundreds of acres of woodland will be freed of this non-native species. A decade or so ago, when teams removed rhododendrons from the

hillsides of North Wales they were attacked by angry locals and tourists who were reluctant to see these colourful plants removed from the landscape. With the promise that the ornamental Rhododendrons on the front lawn will be preserved the cull at Gregynog should go peacefully. Today people are much more aware that the Rhododendron is a pest.

The woodland clearance could be a great opportunity for many flowering plants and animals to recolonise the Estate. Gregynog are seeking both grants and advice about the clearance programme and will welcome suggestions from the public. Surely Montgomeryshire Beekeepers should be in the forefront in recommending strategies to increase the biodiversity of the Estate. The greater diversity of plant life will be better for all bees. Remember also, honey from native woodland plants tastes far better than that from Rhododendrons!

Arthur Finlay



Gregynog Apiary Report

The last three months in the apiary have been a mixed bag, as indeed the previous three months were as well. We started July with high hopes for a good nectar flow which didn't happen, we then had to resort to feeding on top of supers in order to be able to do the "taking off the honey" demo.

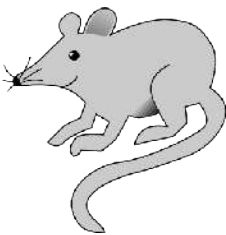
Our main problem this season has been keeping the bees fed - one week we would put supers on and then two weeks later we would be taking them off and feeding again. Honey production generally is about 80-90% down on last year. On a more positive note our colony numbers have increased nicely this year, with thirteen being our maximum count. Some of these will have to be united in the next couple of weeks, so we will probably be back down to nine or ten colonies for the winter.

The training meetings we have organised in this part of the season have again been well received, however "taking off the honey" will be different next year as there were far too many agitated bees flying around! It seems that this is a learning process for all concerned, not just the beginners.

In all it has not been a productive three months in terms of honey, but very useful for our members to get right in there, where it matters, with the bees.

Dave Bennett
Apiary Manager

Toby's Top Tip



If you drill 9 equally spaced holes that are 3/8 inch diameter through your entrance block, top to bottom, when winter comes you can turn the block through 90 degrees and it is a mouseguard.

Toby Beavan



This is a Post Office box which has been taken over by a colony of bees in Devon.

**Courtesy Shropshire BKA
via eBEES**

Bees in the post



A room with a view – the observation hut at Gregynog



Did you ever get a bee in your bonnet?



Many thanks to Ian Hubbock for fitting storage cupboards and anti-bee curtains in the observation hut at the Gregynog apiary (see also picture on the back page)

A Memorable Year

This has been my first year as a beekeeper, I am a complete novice who knows a little bit more now than a year ago!

The bees arrived in a plastic brood box last September 2011. A new colony from David Wainwright, the first of his Queen Breeding Project to try and create bees that are compatible with our lovely welsh climate and that are also calm. My queen was the daughter of a queen called Ana, and she had a good number of bees with her. I welcomed them with open arms and great excitement. My friend and fellow beekeeper, Rainbow, also had a colony from David and we set them both up on my land near Commins Coch.

We had helped David to clear an area of ground and plant an orchard of apple trees and he gave us the bees in exchange. I really like this way of doing things and enjoyed helping to set up the orchard.

Autumn was soon upon us and we checked the hives in early October and settled them down for the winter, with fingers crossed.

In mid October I had a brain haemorrhage, completely out of the blue. I was rushed to hospital and subsequently had brain surgery in Cardiff at The Heath Hospital. The bees were always with me during this very very difficult time. I could hear their gentle hum when the Intensive Care Unit was quiet at night. I could feel them protecting me and holding me safe as if I was in the centre of the hive. When I came round from the operation I came back in a swirling vortex of bees! They made a circular gateway for me to re-enter my body. I found out later that I had died on the operating table and come back to life two hours later. Bees are amazing creatures. They were looking after me!

My recovery was very slow to start with and I longed to be able to go to my bees and thank them for their help. This I managed to finally do in early December. People say you can talk to your bees, I do do this but feel it is also very important to listen, because they have alot to tell us and teach us.

In the late winter we gave the bees their oxalic treatment and shut the hive again, but at least I had seen them, and they looked well and were very calm.

In the spring Rainbow and I attended one of the open days at Gregynog to learn about what to check for in the spring. There was quite a few of us there and not enough smokers so the group I was with had to share a smoker with the group next door. After the top was taken off the hive we all stood around for quite a while and I felt the bees were getting restless as there was a lot of talking over them but not much action going on. Suddenly a bee stung me on the

leg which made me shout out loud. I stayed for a bit longer but felt unhappy, the approach to the bees seemed a bit 'gung ho' to me, but what do I know, I am just a novice. So I excused myself and left. I have since discussed this situation with a more experienced beekeeper who told me he felt the same way.

Since then Rainbow and I have worked with our bees. Rainbow has been to other open days but I have decided to learn from his experience. However we both attended Tom Browns open day at his apiary and I thoroughly enjoyed myself, especially the tea and cake and chat afterwards. I learned lots from talking to other beekeepers and listening to conversations going on around me.

It has been a fast learning curve this year, in more ways than one. We have had a queenless colony, a swarm, bad weather and had to feed sugar water quite alot, but the bees have come through and we have all survived our first year together, for which I am very grateful.

There isn't any honey for me and Rainbow this year but the bees have got some to take them through the winter.

I wonder what next year will bring?

Anne Hooper



"Admit it Beryl - collecting propolts isn't your line"

Reports on meetings

The last two apiary training meetings were well attended and very worthwhile. Although we had had to feed colonies in order to have "honey" to harvest on September 12th (see photos on front cover and centrefold), the many beginners who attended were able to get a hands on feel for the harvesting process. A first treatment of Apiguard was administered to many of the hives, after taking off the honey, as treatment for Varroa.

The weather decided not to play fairly for the "Preparation for Winter" meeting on September

30th. It was almost too miserable to be disturbing the bees, but we were able to add second Apiguard treatments, unite a couple of colonies and feed the lighter ones (yes, hands on hefting was to be had) with ambrosia. Thanks to Dave, Tony and Graham for putting the three groups through their paces.

Chris Leech

Bees in the News

Defra has pledged that it will look into the impact of neonicotinoid pesticides on bee health. The department announced this week it would conduct field trials into the use of these pesticides, but did not feel there was any urgent need for a change in legislation governing their use.

A Defra spokesman said “We take the issue of neonicotinoids seriously and have a rigorous system for testing and assessing pesticides before they are approved. We want to make sure we always have the latest knowledge and are carrying out additional research into them.”

Arguably, though, the “standard test “ is not picking up the problems with neonicotinoid pesticides. Essentially the accepted test is to put a whole lot of insects in a container with the recommended dose of the insecticide, shake it up and leave it a few days. Then to up the dose to eg. double the dose, and if the insects are still alive the pesticide is deemed OK for that particular insect. When the test is done this way all is OK, However in the field it is possible to do the test another way. Catch the bees on the flowers they are visiting, give them a dose of the insecticide and count how many make it back to the hive. With neonicotinoid pesticides less than 50% make it back to the hives. This attrition rate is unsustainable to a colony.

Friends of the Earth slammed Defra's stance. The charity's nature campaigner Paul de Zylva said “The Government's failure to act on neonicotinoid pesticides is astonishing. There is still a massive question mark over the impact of these chemicals in declining bee populations. It's clear the Government has little idea of the damaging impact these pesticides have on bees and other pollinators – pesticide company profits must not be put ahead of their well-being.”

Michelle Boudin

(adapted from Farmers Guardian, Sep 21st 2012)



General Wintering Advice

As the colder weather arrives brood rearing slows down and then ceases, maybe around September or October. The bees that are born towards the end of the season don't need to feed young emerging bees and it's these bees that are the long life winter survivors. As the brood rearing actually stops the temperature requirement in the hive drops from 36C to about 12C and as the outside temperature drops the bees begin to cluster together.

This cluster gets tighter and looser as the outside temperature goes up and down (tighter with the cold) and it is this movement that allows the bees to move onto the stores and use them up.

Winter progresses in this way and I was last year interested to look at a hive that a beekeeper had placed onto two sets of bathroom scales which were an Aldi bargain. Weight records were taken throughout the winter and showed a steady drop in weight (about 250 – 350 grams per week) until spring time, then it stopped still for a while and started to go up again. We all knew that was what would happen, really, but it was still interesting to actually see it!

Before your bees start to cluster there are some basics to be aware of;

- Feeding – A hive going into the winter should weigh about 25kg and any shortfall in this weight can be made up by feeding sugar syrup. More detailed information on feeding is available in the WAG booklet “Feeding Bees” which is available on the WBKA website. A honey flow from Ivy can leave stores that granulate hard and be useless to the bees. This can be a deceptive situation because when you periodically lift (commonly called “hefting”) the hive to check that it still has enough stores for your bees it feels heavy but there isn't food that can be used. If you do get an ivy flow then feeding at the same time can help with this.
- Varroa – An on-time and effective Varroa treatment is an important part of good wintering. It's the bees that are born late in the season and haven't had to feed young bees that make up the winter surviving population. If these bees have not been damaged by the feeding action of these horrible little mites then they are more likely to be healthy. If you need more information about Varroa you can download the bee unit's guide to managing Varroa at <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/index.cfm?pageid=93> or contact your bee inspector.
- Nosema - There are two known Nosema species that can infect honey bees:

Nosema apis and Nosema ceranae. N ceranae was first reported in Apis ceranae in China in 1994 and has been present in Europe since at least 1998. N ceranae was first detected in the UK in 2007. Nosema are microsporidia (primitive fungi) transmitted via spore ingestion. Although Nosema can be spread by dysentery it is not the cause of dysentery. It is, however, a major cause of poor over wintering.

- The Hive – Bees can stand really cold temperatures but not damp, therefore making sure the hive is in good condition, well ventilated and not being dripped on by overhanging objects is important. Also, check the stands are secure and the hives can't be knocked over by animals and install suitable mouse guards, particularly if the hives are close to the ground or next to hedges.



"Must you heft those hives so vigorously Mavis?"

This list is not exhaustive of course but does cover the "before clustering" basics and then once the bees have clustered you need to occasionally lift (heft) the hive to see that stores aren't diminishing too quickly, have mouseguards on, occasionally check for animal, weather or vandalism damage and, of course, carry out the oxalic treatment in late December/early January.



John Beavan

Vote of Thanks

A big vote of thanks to Ian Hubbock for his efforts to improve the observation hut at the apiary. He has fitted storage cupboards, bee resistant curtains and special exits so that any bees which do stray in there can get safely out. Well done Ian.

Second hand equipment for sale.

Our president Jim Crundwell has moved to Eversham and has kindly donated to us the remnants of his extensive collection of beekeeping equipment. Some of the more unusual pieces will be put into our Apiary at Gregynog as discussion pieces, the rest we will sell to members. Jim was quite willing for the equipment to be given to encourage new beekeepers, but we pointed out to him that making a charge would encourage a more thoughtful attitude to beekeeping. People take more responsibility for things they have had to pay for. Jim agreed.

The equipment is stored at my place in Newtown. I have not done an exact count but there are over 20 sets of Smith Hives with base, brood, excluder, supers, crown board and roof. The equipment is old but has been well cared for. I'm selling a complete hive set for about £25. If you try to bully me I'll charge more but it maybe cheaper if you are a particularly deserving case. Remember that all the proceeds are going to the Gregynog Apiary. Contact by email Apiaryman@montybees.org.uk 01686 626872 or 07769 552676.

A Smith hive takes a normal National Frame provided that 8mm is snipped of each lug.

Dave Bennett

be informed, be up to date, be entertained

it must be

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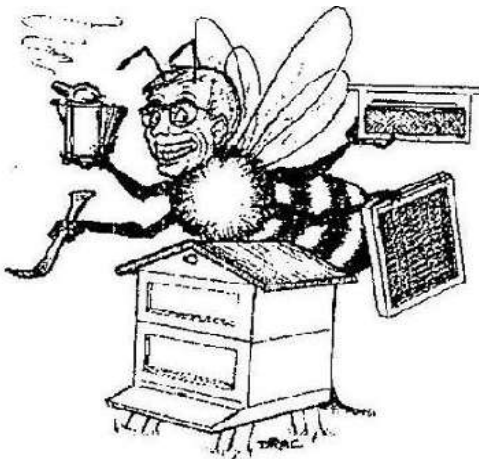
ITEMS FOR ASSOCIATION

MEMBERS

CATALOGUE AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

Address: Little Garth, Garth Lane,
Bettws, Newtown,
Powys, SY16 3LN

Telephone: 01686 625250



The Bee Inspectors

There are three seasonal bee inspectors covering Montgomeryshire. Their areas overlap with other counties, so it isn't as though Montgomeryshire has three bee inspectors all to itself! To arrange for a visit by a Bee Inspector contact the regional bee inspector, Frank Gellatly, who will make the necessary arrangements. Their contact details are as follows.

RBI Frank Gellatly tel: 01558 650588 francis.gellatly@fera.gsi.gov.uk

SBI Peter Haywood tel: 01758 721349 peter.haywood@fera.gsi.gov.uk

SBI John Beavan tel: 01824 707286 john.beavan@fera.gsi.gov.uk

SBI David Coles tel: 01497 820419 david.coles@fera.gsi.gov.uk

Also of possible use is the phone number for the central science lab, where any samples of bees taken by inspectors are sent for testing.

CENTRAL SCIENCE LAB: 01904 462510





The MBKA Committee

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The observation hut at Gregynog gets a slating.

Gauze curtains keep bees
from bothering occupants of
the observation hut at the apiary
(with thanks to Ian Hubbock)



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