



**MONTGOMERYSHIRE BEEKEEPERS
ASSOCIATION**

The BeeHolder

Summer 2013



The MBKA apiary maturing nicely

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Editorial

I have to apologise to Julie Pearce for not getting her article about the new post of co-ordinator for training and exams into the last issue of BeeHolder after she had taken the time to write it and send it to me. Here it is at last (page 12) and I hope that members will take advantage of the opportunity to request training in specific areas, take beekeeping exams etc. Good luck in the new rôle, Julie.

Also congratulations are due to **Wally Shaw** – he spoke at our AGM a couple of years ago and is trying to breed varroa resistant bees on Anglesey – on receiving an OBeeE in the Queen's birthday honours.

Chris Leech

Forthcoming Events

June 22nd

Sat 6:00pm

A Midsummer Night's Bees

Pentrehyling House, Churchstoke, SY15 6HZ

Matt Pollit's apiary is the venue for this special evening meeting so close to midsummer's day. Hive inspection followed by socialising and the traditional pool tea. Phone 0787 0233486

July 7th

Sun 2:00pm

Observatory Apiary Meeting

Observatory, Bwlch y Ffridd, Newtown, SY16 3JB

Ann and Jim Wren keep their bees in this beautiful garden. A pool tea will follow the inspection so that we can discuss what we saw. Phone 01686 688497

August 18th

Sun 10:00am

Apiary training – Preparing to take off honey

at MBKA Apiary, Gregynog Hall, Tregynon

Learn how to take off your share of the bees' hard work safely for both yourself and the little beasts themselves.

September 22nd

Sun 10:00am

Apiary training – End of season

at MBKA Apiary, Gregynog, Tregynon

Preparing for the end of the season – putting the bees to bed for the winter, if you will. Just as vital a part of bee husbandry as any other, I would say, having lost two colonies over winter myself.

Meetings at members apiaries involve a pool tea. Please phone the hosts in advance of the meeting so that they have an idea of numbers attending and so that they can coordinate sweet/savoury contributions to some degree. Apiary training sessions at our Gregynog apiary are not usually followed by pool teas, but there is a cafe facility at the site. Please let Dave know if you are going to attend so that he is prepared for the size of the onslaught (tel 01686 626872).

Chairman's Chat

Every day last week I received between two and four phone calls from members telling me about their lost colonies and asking about replacement stock. It was emotionally exhausting. I could tell some were on the point of tears. I myself was devastated when I found the colonies in my top apiary were dead. In 11 years I had only lost one colony when the mouse guard fell off and mice entered to escape the bitter cold in what is Wales highest apiary at 1350'. The road was blocked by snow for several days, but when I got to the hives on a sunny day I was delighted to see the bees flying over the snow beside the hives to a clump of crocuses. I hefted the hives and noted a healthy weight I inspected again 12 days later at a time when the bees at my home apiary were all busy bringing in pollen. There were dead bees scattered all over the frames, but still plenty of stores. In between inspections it had been warm then a sudden very wet, cold spell. The bees had not clustered for warmth. I was devastated, but my bees did not die in vain because I was able to better empathise with those who phoned with similar stories.

Unless we notice some glaring mistake we have made, we should not blame ourselves if we have lost colonies. 2012 was a dreadful summer many queens were poorly mated and many of these have already turned to being drone layers. The winter was long, cold and and we had a strange false spring and then a very late spring. Bee losses in England are reported to be about 38% on average. The average for Wales is about 45% according to Beebase. However most of those who have phoned about losses have not reported them. I suspect the losses in Montgomeryshire were very much higher, maybe 60%. I hope those who have lost all their colonies will restock. Some of those on the phone had already ordered the Montgomeryshire bred Nucs that the Association is offering. I am able to report that these Nucs are doing OK, but will be later than promised, about mid July. I urged everybody to hold their nerve and not buy imported stock or queens.

The problem of poorly mated queens is something that has been plaguing West Montgomeryshire for many years. I suffer from this myself (*and we can't afford a poorly mated chairman - Ed*) and am convinced that the only reason I still have bees

is that I put queen cells into mini-nucs to be mated in the Newtown Area. There is only one other local beekeeper who has any bees left. My neighbouring beekeepers used to say that losing colonies did not worry them as the hives were always recolonised by a swarm. This is no longer happening and the area of beelessness is spreading.

Can we afford a beeless Montgomeryshire? Some of our members think not and have formed a group to actively breed bees better adapted to our wet wet area. I urge you to read the article “Bringing back the Indigenous bee” on the website (www.montybees.org/indigenous-bee), which I will include in the next issue. Please contact Dave Bennett or Noel Eaton (details page 19) if you think that you can with help this important work.

The Antiques Road Show is coming to Gregynog on Thursday 4th July from 10am till 5pm. About 3000 people are expected and undoubtedly a large number will stroll down to the apiary to inspect it. We need volunteers to explain things to the public, and we will have an observation hive set up in the Apiary viewing hut. Contact me if you are interested in volunteering (details page 19).

Tony Shaw, Chairman MBKA, June 2013

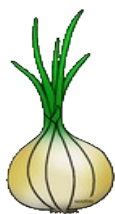


BBKA Spring Convention

Unfortunately Ruth's report on the BBKA Spring convention did not make the publishing deadline. I hope to include it in the next edition, as we always prefer home grown material to articles harvested from the general bee press.

Editor

Herbal Beekeepers Know Their Onions



Fresh onion applied to a bee sting is soothing and healing. Apply onion juice or rub the freshly cut surface of an onion onto the stung area (after scratching off the sting). Try it – it is very effective.

Michelle Boudin

Reports on meetings

May 18th - Disease recognition workshop

What with the weather and everyday challenges for beekeepers, we could really do without any brood disease thank you. The recent workshop at Gregynog gave a good insight into the brood diseases we fear most like AFB (American foul brood) and EFB (European foul brood), as well as chalkbrood, Chinese slipper, parasitic mite syndrome – varroa damage and drone laying queen.

On the up side the chances of AFB and EFB is not significant and the targeted inspections by the National Bee Unit are there to swiftly identify and eradicate any cases found. The advice to us is to inspect colonies at least twice a year and be able to spot the signs of these diseases and others. Choose a day when there is good light and shake the bees off to see comb clearly. One pointer was if your colony is not thriving it's a good idea to inspect too, as this may be a signal of problems. A really good aspect of the workshop was to actually see the diseased comb and identify for yourself the tell-tale signs of the various diseases.

The inspection of diseased comb was done in an isolated room in small groups and we wore plastic aprons and gloves which was quite unsettling and made you appreciate how these diseases need to be isolated and treated very carefully. Given cocktail sticks to delve into cells, some of the diseased comb was pretty disgusting, like the gloopy mush in cells that AFB creates, and the mummified larvae from chalk brood.

What we want to see of course is healthy pearly white larvae in cells, clear segments with even colour and slightly domed, even cappings. To help achieve this there was some good 'barrier management' advice on offer too: like taking care with any second hand kit by thoroughly sterilising it using a gas torch, boiling in washing soda (1kg to 5 litres of water) or making use of steam from a wallpaper stripper to help cleanse kit. Replacing old brood comb annually was recommended and never to use second hand comb (*that's how I lost my hair - Ed*).

Other advice included if you capture a swarm from outside your area to check it over carefully. Not feeding honey to your bees from a source outside your area or from an unknown source was also advised. Also if you take wax scrapings have a bucket handy and put them in that rather than just discard. Keeping hive tools and your bee suit clean were also advocated.

The workshop also considered adult bee diseases. Deformed wing virus is associated with varroa, acarine or parasitic mites. Nosema (symptoms are fouling of the comb or the hive) was also looked at in the microscopy session. It was a good combination to see the colour slides and see things under the microscope, but most powerful was the inspection of diseased comb. If the workshop runs again I'd encourage you to go, whether as novices to learn or as seasoned beekeepers who want a recap. The various activities, like using the microscopes and gowning up to inspect the diseased comb, made the session more real and was a great insight.

The workshop was run by the National Bee Unit and led by Frank Gellatly.

Heather Venis

See also the photograph on page 11 *Ed*



March 17, April 14, May 12 – Apiary Training

All these meetings had to be cancelled/postponed due to the appalling weather. In fact the forecast was dire on each occasion, and rather than have people turn up and the meetings be cancelled on the day, the sensible option was to cancel in advance to avoiding wasted time and travel. Let us hope that the rest of the season offers us some better weather and that the next training – preparing to take off honey – proves necessary!

Chris Leech

Mint sauce with a twist

Take half a jar of warm honey, then fill to the top with chopped fresh young mint and stir well. Serve direct from the jar or add a little balsamic vinegar, and that's it.

Thanks to Stratford on Avon and ebees

Gregynog Apiary Report

In March and April it was still too cold to open up and inspect the bees, so the first “spring inspections” weren't performed until May. As mentioned elsewhere in BeeHolder, the weather was such that none of the apiary training days have been able to go ahead. Winter losses were our worst yet, going from 13 colonies down to two (as I did at home, 13 colonies down to two and I have never lost a colony over winter before!). However Eifion Thomas has kindly leant us two colonies (one of which has swarmed, which was caught) so that we have bees in the apiary for the remaining apiary training days this year.

Numbers are slowly increasing, and the five colonies we now have are looking quite strong, and so hopefully we can start making increase from them shortly. So all you new (and old!) bee keepers out there, don't lose heart. The losses this year have been heavy across the country, so rather than throw in the towel we need more than ever to roll up our sleeves and try and get our apiaries back up to strength so that they can get through the next winter. We will try and plan some additional training days, possibly at short notice, so keep an eye on your e-mails and the web site for updates.



Dave Bennett
Apiary Manager

Better Late than Never

Readers may be interested to note that some of the behaviours seen in colonies during 2012 were not as unprecedented as we had thought. We saw queens being very slow to come into lay last year; the following is an extract from ‘The Essex Beekeeper’ of September 2000, regarding Shetland queens: “In 1999, as soon as drone cells were produced in early May, queen rearing commenced. ...the first queen began to lay 5-6 weeks after hatching and that seemed to set the pattern for the year.

None laid before 5 weeks. The last one took the biscuit though – she started laying eight weeks after hatching and her pattern is excellent. There must be more to this than meets the eye!”

Thanks to Cheshire BKA and ebees

Neonicotinoids - an update

What is happening about neonics and the current state of play? Well, quite a lot.

The EU has put in place a two year ban on three types of neonic - not long for not much; will the scientific research during this short period be strong enough to sway the EU into a longer, or even permanent ban?

There seems little prospect of the UK coming to its senses - Sir Mark Walport, Chief Scientific Advisor to the Government, has been accused by other academics of not understanding the essential precautionary principle that underlies environmental science.

The BBKA continues to sit on the fence.

What can be done about it? Well, quite a lot.

Those advocating a permanent ban must not sit on their hands; if petitions arrive from reputable sources, sign them. The elections to the EU are coming up, write to the party of your choice and ask what is their strategy concerning these pesticides.

Write to the BBKA, refer to the line at the end of paragraph four of their latest statement where they state 'pesticides which must be proven safe for honey bees' and ask them to confirm that they will take this same stance over neonicotinoids.

It cannot be said that this first battle against neonics has been won, let alone the war. The weapons that the good guys hold are scientific evidence and public opinion. With the first, they may influence the second; if the second is mobilised anyway, the bad guys will retreat because the politicians, who are more scared of adverse public opinion than anything else, will abandon them.

So, keep writing, Emailing, signing petitions and asking questions. If the agri-chemical lobby wins and this stuff is allowed back, it will be goodbye to the majority of the pollinating insects and soil fauna that have survived so far.....and we all will live in a poorer, sorrier and more unbalanced land.

Thanks to Bournemouth and Dorset South BKA and ebees

See also the photograph on page 11 *Ed*



The Asian Hornet “hawking” for honey bee prey (article page 13)



Grand entrance to the BBKA
Spring Convention

Thanks to Cheshire BKA
and ebees



Bee keepers opposed to neonicotinide use



Beekeepers combing through the evidence at the disease workshop on 18th May

Training and Exams

Montgomeryshire Beekeeper's Association has created a new rôle on the committee dedicated to helping co-ordinate training and exams for members. Julie Pearce was elected to take on this rôle, and Maggie Summerfield has kindly agreed to work on it as well. The Association has arranged some really excellent introductory and intermediate training sessions with Brian Goodwin as well as providing monthly hands-on training sessions in the Gregynog Apiary. These are run in "real time" and then we get to go back to our own hives and implement what we have learned, which is invaluable. It is really encouraging that increasing numbers of members are helping others gain practical experience with bees at the training Apiary. We are all learning together. We want to build on this and encourage members to come forward to ask for training in specific aspects of beekeeping, as well as to encourage more experienced bee-keepers to share their knowledge. Julie is the person to contact about this. We will always try to find an experienced member of the MBKA to run the course but, where we do not have the skills within the Association, we will seek a tutor from outside.

Other BKAs have had success with running one-day Taster Courses on beekeeping, where the aim is to show the basic principles to those who have not yet got their bees. We will try this ourselves if there is sufficient demand. The emphasis will be less on theory and more on practical experience of handling bees in the Apiary led by our own team of experienced beekeepers.

We also want to encourage members to take some of the bee keeping qualifications available. We will be arranging the Basic Assessment in Beekeeping for members that are interested. Please contact me, Julie (see page 19 for my e-mail address and phone number), if you are interested in doing the exam or have any ideas for courses/training that would be useful for you.

The better the training the better the chances of keeping on beekeeping!

Julie Pearce



The Asian Hornet

We are moving to the time of year when this insect is on the move and can, with a favourable wind, fly across from the French coast. Whilst the south coast is where it is most likely to land, please be vigilant. A hornet with a black abdomen with just one yellow segment and with yellow legs means that it is an Asian hornet - see the photograph on the centre pages.

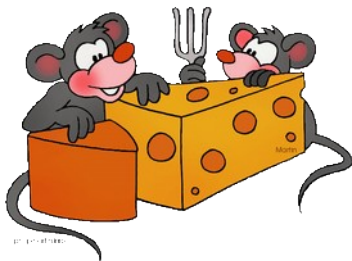
Already invasive species like muntjac deer, grey squirrels and Japanese knotweed are causing problems in Britain (not to mention zebra mussels and tiger mosquitoes, which must be really frightening). The European Environment Agency are also worried that the bee-killing yellow-legged hornet may well arrive on Britain's shores by being accidentally smuggled in trade goods and tourist luggage.

The Asian hornet, which grows to between 2.5cm and 3cm (1-1.2 inches), preys on native honeybees, wasps and other pollinators, potentially devastating hives and threatening honey and crop production. Look on the BeeBase web site, <https://secure.fera.defra.gov.uk/beebase/> for more info on what to look for, what to do if you think that you have seen one, and how to make a home made trap.

Thanks to Bournemouth and Dorset South BKA and ebees



Toby's Top Tip



Instead of grass cutting in front of hives, put a sheet of plywood or something similar there : it keeps the vegetation down, if anything is being thrown out of the hive or dying in front of it then its really visible and mice seem to prefer to be under that than invading a hive on a stand during the winter. A hat trick of benefits!

Toby Beavan

Calibrating Your Refractometer

Have you wondered how accurate your refractometer is?

Here's a simple way to check. Due to the remarkably consistent properties of Extra-Virgin Olive Oil, one drop of it on the slide will always read between 71 and 72 on the 'Brix' scale – the middle one in most refractometers. If you set the lock-nut to show any such oil at 71.5, you will have correctly calibrated the neighbouring scale at the same time.



Thanks to Notts Beekeepers and ebees

So there you go. If you have no idea what a refractometer is used for, either in connection with bees, antifreeze or chain saw maintenance, you have the following options. Ignore refractometers and get on with your life, put combinations of words including refractometer into a post-Prism search engine such as duckduckgo (other search engines are available) or ask an experienced bee keeper.

Ed

be informed, be up to date, be entertained
it must be

THE BEEKEEPERS QUARTERLY
the 64 page full colour magazine in its 25th year
view a sample at <http://www.bkq.org.uk>

£26 per year from Northern Bee Books,
Scout Bottom Farm, Mytholmroyd, Hebden Bridge HX7 5JS (UK)

sales@recordermail.demon.co.uk
<http://www.groovycart.co.uk/beebooks>

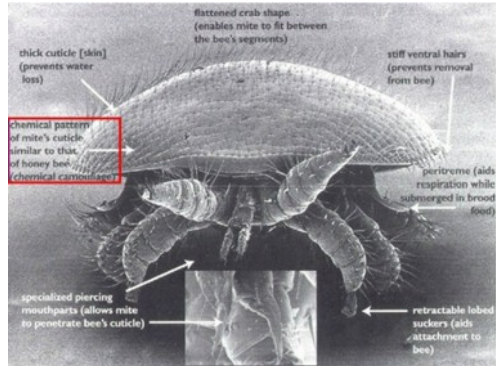
Are you up to date on BeeBase?

Check now as the statistics that beebase generate are of little use if they are inaccurate. Go to www.nationalbeeunit.com or phone 01904 462510 .

Why is the Varroa destructor so successful?

The Varroa mite has developed a wide array of features. Some insects such as ants will never allow a feature to make it successful as a parasite of a stray ant from another colony to enter their honey bee nest when they identify their different chemical profile. While bees are much less fussy, there are marked differences in the chemical profiles of different colonies.

In the same way, both to bees, and to mites, the chemical signatures of adult bees and larvae are clearly and obviously different. Research work by Rickarda Kather explains how a Varroa mite, when it first arrives 'camouflaged' to be 'invisible' on an adult bee, can then alter and adapt her chemical profile so the bees in the new colony don't 'see' her.

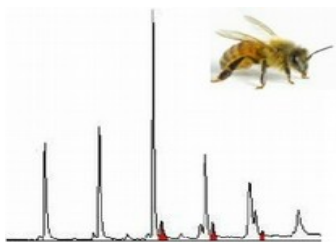


This microscope photograph highlights some of these features, which include:-

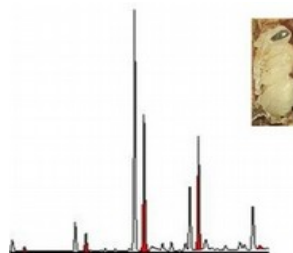
- A flattened crab like shape - which enables the mite to fit between the bees segments.
- Stiff ventral hairs - which helps prevent its removal from the bee.
- The shape of the peritreme surrounding the spiracles in their surface - which aids respiration whilst submerged in brood fluid.
- A thick cuticle skin - which prevents water and moisture loss.
- Retractable lobed suckers - which aid attachment to the bee.
- Specialised piercing mouthparts – which allow the mite to penetrate the bee's cuticle (the surface covering of the bee.)
- The chemical pattern of the mite's own cuticle - which is similar to that of the honey bee and provides a 'chemical camouflage'.

This chemical camouflage is further enhanced by the ability of the mite to adapt its chemical profile to become similar to that of the bee colony and make her invisible.

The rapidity of this adaption can be demonstrated by comparing the profile of an adult bee to a pupa bee, the main difference is in the 'red compounds' (methylalkanes). When a mite is taken from an adult bee, the mite's red compounds are low (as in the adult bee) but when transferred to a pupa, the first change in compounds can already be recorded after twenty minutes and will be almost complete after three hours. The mite just absorbs them and becomes essentially invisible.



Adult Bee Chemical Profile



Pupa Chemical Profile

thanks to Ipswich & East Suffolk Beekeepers and Ricky Kather



Annoying Bees

Do you have the odd bee that buzzes you every time you go to the clothes line or weed the garden? The ones that makes mowing the lawn difficult? Well some of this behaviour is genetic and replacing the queen may help. If not, Ormond and Harry Aebi's book on "Mastering the Art of Beekeeping" tells you how to get over this problem.

Their solution is to make a wave cloth. In other words, have a cloth (old dirty shirt) permanently mounted on a line or stand fairly close to the hive, which moves around in the breeze. The bees see the movement and investigate, but can't do anything about it and soon get used to the movement around them. Very soon you can happily move around your apiary without bees investigating you.

Try it - it works.

Frank Lindsay, Wellington (NZ) BKA

Thanks to Taunton BKA and ebees

Bee Health - a herbal approach

A Bee-keeper carried out a trial over 2009/10 and his hives not only survived one of the worst winters that we have ever had, but the brood increased by 30%. HOW?

There were very few varroa mites at the time of the brood. WHY?

These results have continued.

1. All hives were kept clean and free from chemical insecticides. It is thought that over time, the insecticides impregnate the fabric of the hive and are the serious cause of colony collapse (Ohio, USA Bee-keepers). So new frames, or frames free from contamination are needed.
2. A winter feed of 5 grams of garlic to 1 kilo of sugar in solution was given until the new brood started. Garlic was then discontinued during honey production. However replacing garlic with an infusion of nettles to the last feed increased the brood by 40%. As many humans use garlic to boost their immunity to disease. Does it also do this in bees? Nettles contain trace elements, maybe these increase fertility? Garlic is also known to kill and/or cause the varroa mite to leave the bees.
3. The colonies were large, at least 1 1/2 times the brood. This ensured enough warmth & ample workers in winter for food gathering.
4. The garlic controlled the varroa mite in the winter and icing sugar dusting controlled the mite in spring and summer.
5. You will also need nectar and pollen rich flowers. Please plant them. This system is cheap, organic and it works!

So could garlic, or any alium spp, alter the odour balance inside the hive to the detriment of the varroa mite? If so, would it not upset the bees' pheromone communication?

At worst it seems harmless, and proprietary feeds contain supplements, possibly even nettle extraction. Only proper trials would give a clear result, but it is an interesting thought.

From an article published by Bournemouth and Dorset South Beekeepers Association & in Ebees via a letter from Margaret Alton BSc of Doncaster

This appears to have done the rounds of various bee keeping magazines, and in the course has perhaps become slightly Chinese whispered, hence the strange sentence construction and poor English. Perhaps somebody out there would like to investigate this further, as the results claimed do look very impressive. Ed

BRIAN NORRIS

FOR ALL BEEKEEPING EQUIPMENT

AGENT FOR THORNES

DISCOUNT ON CERTAIN

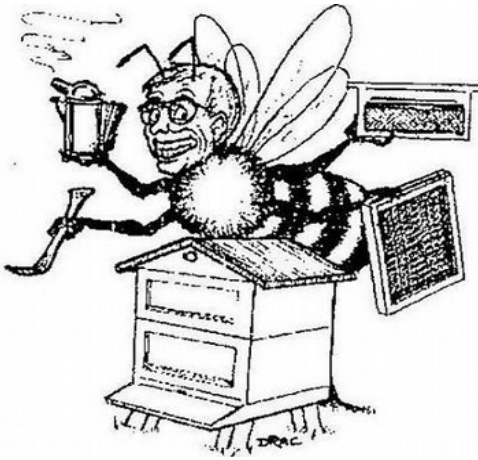
ITEMS FOR ASSOCIATION

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

the SBI position covering east Montgomeryshire is currently vacant

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





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Bee with morning dew – thanks Blackburn bee keepers and ebees

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