

ABKA

ABERYSTWYTH AND DISTRICT
BEEKEEPERS' ASSOCIATION



In this issue

Ian gave an excellent and highly informative talk, in quiz form, on the Asian Hornet in February. His presentation has been attached as a separate document. All the information about this new threat to our bees can be found in it's pages. Well worth a read.

Lynfa has kindly provided an article on the Bilberry Bumblebee.

Rob has written about how we can look after the bees that don't live in hives.

Siobhan has written an article about the Midland and South West Counties Convention that she attended last autumn.

Upcoming events

- 18th April Swarming part 2 - The Snelgrove method by Lynfa.
- 21st May Visit to Ann's apiary - Spring jobs in the apiary.
- 3rd June Bee diseases workshop at IBERS with Frank Gellatly.
- 19th July Apiary safari in the Cletwr valley, Tre'r Ddol including a plant talk by Richard.
- 28th August Talybont Country Show.



Keep an eye on stores

Spring can be a critical time for your bees - they are starting to forage for pollen and the queen is beginning to lay more eggs, but nectar is in short supply.

It's time to keep a close eye on the stores in your hives. Hefting can help - if the hive feels light then they might need some supplementary feeding.

At this time of year light syrup (1:1 sugar to water) can be fed.

Don't go overboard though, as we don't want to fill the comb with stores. The queen needs room to lay, so just feed enough to keep them going.

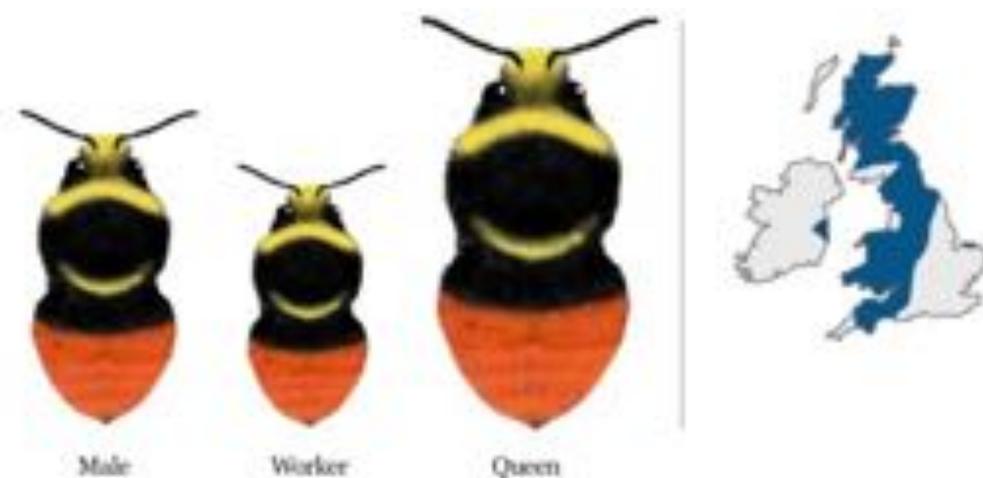
The Bilberry Bumblebee

Lynfa Davies

The Bilberry or Blaeberry Bumblebee, *Bombus monticola*, has a fairly wide distribution across the UK but is strongly associated with upland heathland and moorland areas. The Bumblebee Conservation Trust (BBCT) are particularly interested in sightings of this bumblebee because while it is not considered rare it is very under-reported and therefore they do not know the full extent of its distribution. That's where we come in!! Any sightings, which ideally should be accompanied by photographs, grid references and the date can be reported to the BBCT via their recoding system iRecord which can be found at <http://bit.ly/BBCTiRecord>.

This Bumblebee prefers a varied landscape that supports heather-rich areas, species-rich grassland and open-structured woodland - much of which we have in Mid Wales. While it doesn't depend solely on the Bilberry plant it is rare to find it in areas that does not support the Bilberry plant. Other favoured food plants include willows, gorse, heathers, clovers, Devil's-Bit scabious, bird's-foot trefoil, thistles and brambles.

This is a very distinctive bee with the abdominal pile bright red from segment 2 or 3 onwards, a yellow collar and a yellow-fringed scutellum. Queens are relatively small but broadly-built. Males have a conspicuously yellow-haired head in contrast to queens and workers.



Source: Bumblebee Conservation Trust website <http://bumblebeeconservation.org/about-bees/identification/scarce/>

An excellent site for helping with bee identification, and many other insects, is Steve Falk's flickr site <https://www.flickr.com/photos/63075200@N07/>. Photos of the Bilberry Bumblebee can be seen here which may be more useful than the diagrammatic style of the BBCT images above.

The BBCT would also be interested in any other bumblebee sightings and your records are invaluable for building up a picture of where bees are distributed. If you need help with identification photographs can be posted on the BWARS (Bees, wasps and ants recording society) Facebook page. There is also more information on their website <http://www.bwars.com/content/submitting-your-records>.

I hope you enjoy keeping a look out for bees this spring and summer and any records you submit will be really useful for understanding more about these vital pollinators.

Happy bee hunting!!

In Britain we are blessed with many species of Bee. As beekeepers we are all aware of the Honey Bee *Apis mellifera* and in Britain we also have 250 other species of bees from three groups.

Solitary Bees.

These are the majority of species. There are about 225 species in the UK. Some look like honey bees but are smaller. This group of bees are among the most efficient pollinators.



Bumble Bees.

These are the furry bees that most people think of when discussing bees. There are around 25 species in the U.K. The queen is the only one that lives through the winter. She finds a suitable site in the spring and starts the nest on her own, until the workers emerge and take over the duties she had previously done on her own.

Honey Bees.

These are the bees beekeepers keep. They are social with one species and several sub species, although in reality the vast majority of honey bees in the U.K. are mongrels.



So as can be seen the Honey bee is only one of many species all of which have an important role in pollinating lots of our plants. Where would we be in a world without pollinators? For one thing the countryside would be a very drab place with fewer flowers. Our food would also be very boring. Can you imagine meals without such foods as apples, plums, peaches, raspberries, cucumbers, tomatoes? The list is endless. Some plants like tomatoes require a specific pollinator such as bumble bees for their pollination. So what can we do to help these different bee species?

For a start we can plant flowers in our gardens to provide bee food, not the fancy modern flowers as most are unsuitable as they produce little nectar and pollen. As a general rule we should plant the old style cottage garden flowers.

We can also provide a nesting site for the solitary bees. Many solitary bees use holes in plants and trees in which to lay an egg and rear their young. Its a very easy process to make a Bee Hotel and some species take to them readily. So I have recently made a few bee hotels for our garden. Its a simple matter of finding a suitable piece of wood and drilling holes of various diameter into it. Then placing it in a warm sunny spot.



I decided to use some logs which I cut in half lengthwise. I angled the cut on top of the log to shed rain. Then I set about drilling as many holes in the log as possible. Use any size of drill bit as different species need different size of hole and generally the bees are happy to nest side by side. I have attached these to fence posts or hung them up in the garden, making sure they are in direct sunlight. I will know if its been successful as the bees cap the holes with mud after they have laid their eggs. So it's now a matter of waiting and hopefully in the summer I will be providing a home for a new generation of bees. Please give it a go as it's not only the honey bee which needs our help. Little things like this can help the other 249 bee species in the UK.

The Midland and South Western Counties Convention

Last October I travelled down to the Gower to attend the MSWCC conference. It was truly a weekend well spent, as the range of speakers and workshops were of huge interest, and covered an impressive range of subject matter.

The lecture series kicked off with Dinah Sweet talking about pollen and identifying pollen in honey. A series of beautiful slides of different pollens illustrated her talk. Dinah runs courses on identifying pollen in honey. Dinah's expertise and interest were infectious, and had Lynfa and I planning to head off to Dinah's next workshop, so we could spend a day peering through microscopes at pollen.

Next up was ABKA's very own Lynfa Davies, talking on honey bee behaviour and the mechanisms bees use to manage their lives. This talk was really interesting and informative, particularly to a new beekeeper like myself. The take-home message from this talk is the importance of understanding what the bees are doing, and why, so beekeepers can successfully manage and manipulate the bees.

Lynfa also pointed out that there is no particular start or finish to the beekeeping year, rather, like any living creature, there is a continuous cycle. What we as beekeepers do in the autumn and winter is just as important as what we do in the spring and summer. And, as beekeepers, we need to always be thinking about the next season, and planning ahead. Lynfa also talked about the extraordinary communications that go on within the hive, such as dancing, sharing food, and the powerful role played by pheromones. While the mysteries behind these various forms of communication are enormous, the little bit we do know about all of these helps to show how fascinating the lives of bees are.

Wally Shaw gave two talks, one on locally adapted bees in Wales and the other on what we know and don't know about swarming. Wally reminded the audience of the many benefits of keeping bees who are genetically adapted to a specific area and its unique weather conditions. He also talked about the genetic traffic between feral colonies and hives, which helps bees to become more resilient to the many viruses and bacteria that can affect them. His second talk, on swarming, included enough information to fill the entire weekend's lecture series! Wally pointed out that much of the scientific information he has read on swarming does not meet up with his practical experience of beekeeping.

Most of his lecture was based on what he has actually seen and experienced himself in his many years of keeping bees on Anglesey. Wally reminded the audience that the presence of queen cells does not necessarily mean the colony is about to swarm; rather it can be a sign of emergency reconvening, or supersede. There are many factors involved in the swarming processing bees. Weather, a crowded brood box, pheromones and hive temperature can also affect swarming.

Like Lynfa's talk, Wally's talk was grounded in the behaviour of bees, and how important it is for beekeepers to understand bee behaviour if we are to keep bees and manage them successfully. All honey bee behaviour is ultimately about reproduction and survival. Wally also pointed out that when swarming is about to happen, bees are reluctant to draw comb. So if we see that our bees are not drawing out new foundation, it might be a sign that they are preparing to swarm. Having said that, Wally also said that with there are more unknown than knowns, and the issue of swarming is complex, with each new season presenting more lessons for beekeepers.

Wally's WBKA booklet on swarm control has a lot of practical guidance on this issue, and I returned home to the booklet with a heightened appreciation of its advice on this complex issue.

There was also a very interesting talk by Becky Masterman, of the University of Minnesota Bee Squad. Becky talked about the work that is being done there on varroa research, and a citizen science project to help to try and monitor varroa levels. Apparently the varroa situation in many parts of the states is so severe that many beekeepers are having to treat for mites up to four times per season. This talk made me very glad to be learning to keep bees in Wales.

Ken Basterfield gave a very useful talk on double brood chamber working. Ken is incredibly knowledgeable, and gave a really good illustrated talk on the benefits of working with a double brood. I don't want to misquote him or mislead readers by getting any of the facts about this method of management wrong. Suffice it to say that, between his talk and a chat with Lynfa Davies afterwards, it sounds like a very sensible, useful method, and one I will look into further, and perhaps try this year.

On a historical level, Peter Tompkins talked engagingly about his 70 years' experience as a beekeepers, with many years spent as apiary manager for Rothamstead Research Institute. Again, there was a clear benefit from hearing about the experience of keeping bees, rather than just what books and papers say about bees.

Natasha de Vere spoke about the National Gardens of Wales' project, which uses DNA barcoding to identify the plants that bees visit. Honey samples have been sent in from beekeepers throughout Wales and the UK. The most abundantly found pollens were dandelion, clover and Prunus. Also frequently found were thistle, brassicas, Himalayan balsam, hawthorne and apple. When I asked Natasha how her records compared to observations by beekeepers, I was very interested to hear that most of what they found was in direct parallel to the plant list in Howes' 1945 Plants for Beekeeping. This just goes to show that understanding bees doesn't necessarily need state of the art scientific equipment: good observation has a key role to play.

As well as the incredibly wide range of lecture topics, there was also a series of hands-on practical workshops covering microscopy, mead making, wax and batik, making an observation hive, and the chance to chat to several overseas speakers about their work with beekeepers in other countries. Aaron Mujuni from TUNADO, Uganda and Michael Adjaloo, a Research Fellow from Ghana, also spoke about their work with beekeepers in these two countries.

The conference had a very friendly, welcoming and supportive atmosphere. It was a great opportunity for a new beekeeper such as myself to learn a lot of useful information. For me, the take-home message from the weekend was to understand as much as possible about what bees do, why and when they do it, and the surrounding environmental conditions that they live in. By understanding these, I can then (hopefully!) manage my bees more successfully. I would definitely encourage other beekeepers to attend future MSWCC conferences.

Siobhan Maderson

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Supplies

The Association buys hive treatments in bulk, and owns processing equipment that is available for members to rent. Please contact Ann.

Treatments

Apiguard	Thymol varroa treatment	£ 2.00 per tray
MAQS	Formic acid varroa treatment	Price on Request
Acetic acid	Hive disinfectant	£ 1.64 per 100ml

Feed

Fondanbee	Bee Fondant	£11 per 12.5kg
Invertbee syrup	Inverted sugar syrup	
	Price dependent on bulk buy	£13 per 14kg can

Jars

1lb glass jars	Lids included	29p each
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Equipment

Honey extractor	Please return clean	£5 for 3 days
Heather honey press	Please return clean	£5 for 3 days
Steam Electric Wax Extractor		£5 for 3 days *

*Plus £5 deposit, refunded if extractor is returned clean.

Muslin liners	For use in steam wax extractor	£1
Electric Wash Boiler	For cleaning frames	£5 for 3 days

ABKA Beekeeping Library

Guide to bees and honey 5th edition	Ted Hooper
Keeping bees and making honey	Alison Benjamin
Beekeeping up to date	Joseph Tinsley
Beekeeping self-sufficiency	Joanna Rye
The Honey bee inside out	Celia F Davis
A world without bees	Alison Benjamin and Brian McCallum
Haynes Manual	Claire Waring
Splitting hives as part of varroa control	William Hesbach
Practical beekeeping	Clive De Bruyn
Beekeeping study notes 2012	JD & BD Yates

DVD - Beekeeping of a bygone era
DVD - The Mysterious Bee: a documentary bee behaviour and basic beekeeping
DVD - An introduction to keeping bees
Video - The monk and the honeybee

If you would like to borrow anything, please contact Vicky at vicky.j.davies@btinternet.com

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