



## KINGSTON BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

### **Chair's Report - AGM 2022**

Welcome to the Chair's report prepared for the 143rd AGM of the Kingston Beekeeping Association.

As Avis, the Apiary Manager, will explain in her report it was a very interesting beekeeping year. In the relatively short time that I have been keeping bees I have come to realise that all beekeeping years are "interesting". With concerns over Covid diminishing the committee and training got back to relatively normal meetings with the Saturday afternoons at the apiary proving to be very popular. There is nothing to beat hands on training with experienced beekeepers. A measure of the success of Avis and the training team is the high number of new members that started to keep bees, and number of our members that undertook the Basic Assessment along with some of our Junior members, in total 4 members gained the Basic Assessment and 5 young people gained the Junior Assessment.

Previously I have spoken about some of our external projects, in addition to training and supporting beekeepers we have a remit to help non beekeepers understand the importance of bees and other pollinators. Our project with the Bentall Centre continues to be real success, the bees that were installed last year on the second floor balcony thrived thanks to the care given to them by Claire, Janet and Mari who joined the team. With help from centre staff in the spring we filled three of the massive planters with compost and planted them with pollinator friendly plants. Not only did the bees produce a significant amount of honey but they continue provide interest for the centre staff. It's not unusual to find staff taking their coffee break watching the bees through the window. It's expected that the corridor walls will soon get the bee information panels and that we can start to invite school classes to visit. Our thanks go to Claire, Janet and Mari for all their hard work, it's not easy working with bees in a commercial setting. Mari, beekeeping and KBKA has recently featured in the Bentall Centre 30th anniversary celebrations with a photo of her and the hives appearing in their Twitter and LinkedIn feeds.

A major event for us this year was the return of beekeeping to the Hampton Court Garden Festival, this followed an introduction to the RHS organising team by one of our members and we were invited to take on a stand in the community garden area. Your committee took up the challenge and a small group of us put together a display based on helping gardeners to understand pollinators and how best to provide for them. We headlined with "The Buzz of the Bees" and the tagline that "you don't have to keep bees to look after them". Keith and Nick Peto modified our display hive and joined it with plastic tubing to a large perspex sphere. This allowed visitors to see the bees in flight as well as in the hive. As always the live bee display drew in the crowds and this gave us the opportunity to engage visitors in the conversations about bees. We surrounded the exhibit with hexagonal planters filled with pollinator friendly plants. Thirty six of our members volunteered for the staffing rota and the stand was a real success. It was constantly busy, our thanks go to Mike for designing the display, to the build team of Keith, Mike and Jem, and especially to all of those who gave up their time to staff the exhibit. The

overwhelmingly positive feedback leads us to think that if invited we will have another go next year.

Last year I mentioned that we had an approach from the Freemasons to put bees in the grounds of a centre run by a charity for children with additional needs. This was put on hold during Covid and as restrictions lifted the charity decided not to take the project any further. Other opportunities to work with young people have appeared during the year. Students from the Kingston Academy paid a visit to the apiary and we have just started working with Reed's School that is only 10 to 15 minutes away from the apiary. One of their student leadership team suggested that they might do some work with bees, staff visited the apiary in the summer and last week I met students at a house assembly. They gave us a table at their Christmas Fair and we are working towards a long term relationship to help them understand bees and the importance of pollinators. At the Christmas Fair we had conversations with both the biology and sustainability staff and the house tutor is keen get his students doing some practical work at the apiary.

We continue to undertake other schools presentations with Barry taking the lead on working with primary schools, his bee play makes a real impact on the younger children.

The support that the apiary receives from our members who volunteer their time to teach, support and keep the apiary running is significant. We can't underestimate the massive impact that this work has on the association, Jane has crunched some of the numbers, based on the weekend head count, There were nearly 600 visits to the apiary up to the end of October, over 220 of those were our apiary support team. Assuming that they spent 3 hours at a time working there provided over 660 hours of volunteer time to give the equivalent of 1125 hours of training and support. This doesn't include all of the extra hours that people put in outside of that time. This doesn't constitute a formal impact statement but does give an idea of how much work the team puts in.

The AGM gives me the opportunity to formally thank the committee for all of the work that they put in throughout the year to support KBKA, beekeepers and bees in the area.

Our thanks to Avis, and David, for all of the work at the apiary delivering some amazing results in occasionally challenging circumstances.

Thanks to Anne Jones for continued work as the treasurer, Anne tried to give up a couple of years ago but offered to carry on while we looked for a replacement. Covid got in the way and it all took a longer than expected. We were very grateful when Keith offered to take on the job. Keith also continues to act as our honey sales machine, running stalls at various farmers markets and even doing home deliveries. The one man Deliveroo for honey.

Thank you to Jane who continues look after the social calendar and our email communications. Jane also does loads of work on Saturday afternoons trying to keep us organised and focussed. If you have any ideas for social or training events please have a chat with her.

Thanks to Julie as secretary for trying to make some sense of our committee meetings, Mike for all of brand, design and comms. work. Also to Chris for his practical support to the apiary.

Of course Mike and Keith were again involved in organising the SBKA honey show.

In addition to Anne Jones leaving the committee we have a couple of other changes this year. Firstly Ann Connolly is stepping back from her role as membership secretary and running our small allotment patch. All of you will have had some contact with her at some stage and will know that her quiet efficiency will be missed. Ann can't be with us this evening but we send our thanks for all of the work that she has done.

Also stepping down from the committee is John Legate. John also can't attend the meeting but John has given many years of service to KBKA, he has always championed bees, pollinators and biodiversity. We will all miss his support and as chairman I personally will miss his ability cut through the chatter, get to the point and bring a meeting back on track. In recognition of his outstanding service to the association we are making John an honorary KBKA member.

Finally thanks to everyone who has helped out the association over the past year. To those of our members who train the students on Saturdays, mow the grass, cut the hedges, bake cakes, work on shows, extract honey, mentor new beekeepers or chase swarms..... Thank you.... Their help is much appreciated and their efforts are what makes our association such a success.

Martyn Milner, Chair

## **APIARY MANAGER'S REPORT AGM 2022**

The last of the covid 19 restrictions were eased during the Beginners' Winter Theory sessions and it was great to see everyone's faces and lecture to 'real' people when masks could be discarded. The 8 week course was over subscribed and 22 people attended either in person or on Zoom.

The intermediates from 2020 finally finished their training with the Bailey comb change in March and 16 people commenced the Beginners' Practical in April. It was six weeks of swarming, it must be one of the smarmiest seasons ever, particularly as the weather was still rather cool. It was an intense few weeks with nucs and splits everywhere in the apiary, but what an excellent way to learn swarm control!

Never before have we managed to set up so many beginners with bees and supply those members with swarms who had had losses over the winter. As a five frame nucleus of bees from commercial beekeepers is now some £300, this was an excellent outcome.

Five young people were trained for the Junior Assessment and all passed with flying colours and we were complimented on the high standards achieved. A diary had to be kept and a project made, one of which was then entered at the National Honey Show and won first prize in that section. Four members passed the Basic Assessment in difficult conditions because so many hives at that stage had queen cells and were queenless or had been split and did not have eight frames of brood.

Demand for Can I Keep Bees was not so high this year, and only one day was offered, on which 10 people attended. The weather was inclement but all seemed to enjoy the experience and some have registered for the beginners' course next year.

The hottest Saturday of the year was booked for the apiary extraction day when some 400 lbs of honey went into buckets ready to be bottled. The honey flowed well, it was just everyone else who was wilting in the intense heat. It was a good outcome, but an exhausting day.

It was then a matter of the bees cleaning the supers, taking them off and storing them for the winter. The varroa treatments went on and then the strips removed a week later. The long, mild autumn meant the bees were active until late in the season, bringing in ivy nectar. A few hives were fed, where necessary, but mostly they are over wintering on their own stores. The season finished with 16 hives in the apiary.

The last Saturday session was an apiary tidy up morning on 5th November, when the logs and branches from the tree arborist's activities were piled up, bushes pruned and the perimeters tidied up.

The equipment has been well maintained and the grass mown throughout the season. The new landing boards on the hives looked good and allowed better observation of the bees. The Arnia system has been installed and members can be given access to the information relayed from the apiary. It records the bees' activity, humidity and temperature in the hives. An educated guess can then be made as to whether there is brood in the hive. The other big advantage is recording the weight of the three hives, which will indicate whether the bees require feeding over the winter and during the season, when the flow starts and finishes. There have been teething problems with the systems and we are still waiting for the issues with two of the scales to be resolved.

The KBKA Apiary is a training apiary, run by volunteers, and it has been the longest, busiest season I can remember. Absences from covid, holidays etc have had to be covered and on occasions we have been stretched. However, it has been strong teamwork, the beginners have been very regular attendees and we have all learnt much and had good fun in the process. Many, many thanks to all concerned.

Avis Marshall, Apiary Manager