



KINGSTON BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

Chair's Report - AGM 2023

Welcome to the Chair's report prepared for the 144th AGM of the Kingston Beekeeping Association.

As Avis will explain in her report it was another "interesting" beekeeping year but as I have said before it appears that all beekeeping years are "interesting". I guess the longer we spend trying to understand bees the more we realise that there is always more to learn, it appears that the bees don't read the same books as us.

KBKA has a remit to provide support and training for local beekeepers and it is a credit to Avis and the team of apiary volunteers that our practical courses are so successful. Being able to run the courses in our own training apiary with experienced beekeepers gives new beekeepers a good introduction to their hobby. Even beekeepers who bought bees and watched YouTube videos during lockdown are realising the value of hands-on training. Not only are we able to help some of them go onto keep their own bees but some of our members have gone on to successfully take the BBKA Basic Assessment. We will, of course, be offering our winter classroom based courses and the spring/summer apiary based courses next year.

As an association we continue to try and help non-beekeepers understand the importance of bees and other pollinators. We take up as many opportunities as possible to talk about bees. This year we again took a stand at the RHS Hampton Court Garden Festival. We think that this was even more successful than last year, with an even better site, close to some of the display gardens we had access to even more visitors. Again the stand showed off our modified observation hive with the perspex sphere which draws in the visitors and allows them to get close to the bees and see them in flight. This give us the opportunity to talk to gardeners about planting for pollinators, beekeeping and our concerns about the Asian Hornet. Again we used the "Buzz of the Bees" headline and taking view that "you don't have to keep bees to look after them". It's hard to estimate the number of conversations that we had with visitors but it must have run into thousands and a significant number of visitors asked for details of our courses. Our stand was again surrounded by hexagonal planters displaying a range of pollinator friendly plants. The show requires quite a bit of planning and we couldn't do it without our members volunteering to help out. Over a quarter of our members volunteered to take part in the event giving nearly 400 hours of their time. We ran a formal feed back after the show and those that took part were overwhelmingly in favour of doing the event again should the opportunity arise. Thanks go not just to our enthusiastic volunteers but the small organising and build team of Keith, Mike and Jem, with Jane making sure that we got our health & safety paperwork sorted out.

In addition to Hampton Court we attended the Surbiton Festival, again with live bees, not only were we able to talk about bees but we also sold honey, a remarkable 265 jars, worth over £2000 in just over 5 hours.

This year for the first time we had a bee and honey display in the Community Showcase at Kingston Library this was in place several months..... No live bees this time, although we did consider it.

We continue to have a small team of Claire, Mari and Janet who look after our bees at the Bentall Centre. I know that beekeeping on a balcony on the second floor of a shopping centre is a challenge but despite their concerns the bees are still there. Thank you for the work that you put in. Our contact at the management company has moved to another location but the project continues.

Some of our most rewarding bee conversations are with young people, Barry continues visit schools with his own style of bee presentations. We have had an apiary visit from students from the Kingston Academy and we are progressing our relationship with Reed's School which is not far from the apiary.

We are always trying to improve our courses and recently realised that the our usual "Can I Keep Bees?" one day events during the summer were not attracting the numbers of participants that we would expect. We thought that the title and the duration might imply more commitment than people would be willing to give. Your committee decided to shorten the programme to just half a day, change the title to "The Buzz of the Bees" and make it more of a meet the bees taster event. It still involves a chat about bees and pollinators, seeing the bees up close and of course cake. The first events have been successful and we will be looking to refine them for next year.

So looking at the numbers here's what we have managed to achieve this year.....

Teaching - 8 Beginners Theory classes, 6 Module Study groups, 3 Basic Assessments

Apiary - We've had over 450 visits to the 18 hives in the Apiary

Honey - 140 lbs of honey from the Apiary, converted to 195 jars

People - 12 Apiary Teachers and 5 Queen Rearers have helped 9 beginners and 11 intermediates

Community - 10 Social Events, 2 Beekeeping Shows (Claygate & Surrey), Show stand at RHS Hampton Court Garden Festival, stand at Surbiton Festival plus honey sales at Farmers Markets

Website - Over 5000 visitors and 2000 page views, plus the introduction of the new members area.

Awards - Surrey and National Honey Show

Communications - 52 news updates sent directly to our members.

Support - 10 suits loaned, 14 extractor loans, 62 cakes shared & eaten!

As you can see we've been pretty busy..... None of this happens without the help and dedication of our volunteers and this gives me the opportunity to formally thank your committee for all of the hard work that they put in throughout the year.

Thank you to Avis, and of course David, for all of the hard work and time that they give to the apiary and to our courses.

Thanks to Keith who took on the role of treasurer recently, in addition juggling the numbers he continues to operate our one-man honey sales team.

This time last year Kate volunteered to look after our membership lists, subscriptions and course bookings. I know it's been a steep learning curve with eR2, the BBKA membership system, so thank you for your time and effort.

Thank you Jane for looking after our email communications, socials and attempting to keep us organised and focussed on Saturday afternoons.

Thanks also go to Julie for managing to turn our committee ramblings into minutes, Mike for all of brand and design work. Bryn for his IT skills and wrangling the website into something more accessible. Also to Chris and Jem for their practical support to the apiary and events

Thanks also go to all of you for your support... Thanks for whatever you did for KBKA this past year. If you helped at the apiary, cut the grass, wrangled with the Hawthornes, baked cakes, looked after bees, dug the allotment, sold honey, mentored a new beekeeper, worked on a stand or just talked about bees to your friends.... Thank You, your support is essential to our success.

The AGM isn't just about what happened last year it is also a good chance to look forward..... As you will see from Avis' report we need to be thinking seriously about the threat of the Asian Hornet. For a number of years we have been watching French beekeepers, and more recently those in the Channel Islands try to tackle the problem but 2023 has seen the Hornet establish a foothold in England. In 2022 there was just 1 nest found in Kent and one confirmed hornet capture in Suffolk. As the season comes to an end this year the official figure is up to 72 nests in 56 locations!! One of the confirmed nests was in at Thamesmead in south west London just over 20 miles away and another in Oxted just 17 miles away as the bee flies!

It is clearly time to stop talking about the problem and start getting seriously prepared to help our bees and beekeepers cope with the invasion. The Asian Hornet is not going away! With this in mind we are formulating an action plan and our usual winter module course will be solely about the Asian Hornet. With your help we will be better prepared.

Also looking to the future your committee will be meeting early in the new year to specifically think about the direction that the association is taking. Whilst we regularly plan for the year ahead we rarely think about where we might be in the next 2 - 5 years. It would be good to think about where we might be and what we would like to be doing. If you have any thoughts please have a chat with one of the committee members, it would be good to hear from you.

Your committee are conscious that we could be doing more and our future plans will need more help. We know that we are looking for volunteers for the Asian Hornet Action Team, Barry has decided that he wants to scale back his school presentations, we need more help maintaining the apiary and we are determined to get the Queen Rearing off the ground. The idea is that all of these jobs will be team based, we know that it's more fun when you work with others and spread the load. If you are interested please let one of the committee know and also don't be surprised if you get asked to help out..... please think about it, it will be fun!

Thank you again for a very successful year.