



KINGSTON BEEKEEPERS ASSOCIATION

Report to SBKA - 2024

It's been another interesting year.... The weather was unpredictable, so were the bees, we had the threat of the Yellow Legged Hornet hanging over us, but as always we got on and did the stuff that we are good. Helping our members to look after bees, and telling the public how important our pollinators are.

Earlier in the year your committee got together for a morning specifically to think about the future of Kingston Beekeeping. What did we want it to look like in the future, what did we want to be doing and what was holding us back? As a result of this lively discussion we have a sort of development plan, a prioritised list of things that we agreed that need to do. This list is reviewed at our committee meetings, some items have already been ticked off, such as having more trained first aiders, some of the more complex and less urgent things will be tackled soon.

While we are talking about the committee I should mention that there have been some changes over the past year. Mike, who looked after our design & comms and Julie our secretary have moved to the south coast and resigned from their roles on the committee. We are very grateful for all the hard work that they have done over the years. Mike has offered to continue his design work for us on an occasional basis and Julie remains as secretary to SBKA.

Our other loss this year was Chris Reid who sadly died back in May. Many of our beekeeping colleagues attended his funeral. Chris had been a member for nearly 20 years, he learned his craft with Kingston Beekeepers, went on to teach beginners, joined the committee and subsequently became the Saturday "Shed Man". Anyone who took part in an extraction day will recall his attempts to organise the honey buckets and his frustration with mismatched plastic lids. Saturday afternoons at the apiary are not quite the same and we suspect that the shed will never be quite as tidy as he would have expect it to be. Members of the Saturday crowd will recall that Chris was always the last to leave and prepared for his journey home by sitting at a picnic table with a roll-up. As a result of some very generous donations at his funeral we are planning to install a memorial seat just inside the entrance to the apiary. In preparation we are having some work done to the gates and the fence so Chris' Corner will be ready for the start of the next beekeeping year.

One thing that had worried Chris was the state of the apiary marquee roof, it had suffered over time and the committee spent ages discussing the options. After a great deal of research work by Keith we finally commissioned a custom made replacement using the type of material that is used on the curtain sides of artic truck trailers. It fits really well, looks great and should last for many years.

We have always been clear that one of our remits is to promote beekeeping and the importance of pollinators to a wider community. We have continued to be involved in community events whether those are big showcase events like the RHS Hampton Court Festival to smaller events like school fairs. We have contributed to the Claygate show, the

Surbiton Festival, the Saxon Fayre, Surrey Honey Show, Farmers Markets, there have been school presentations, lunches with women's groups and conversations with later living groups. A lunchtime "Ted Talk" to sales staff at the Unilever offices in Kingston has led to us running a pop-up honey shop next week in the staff restaurant. We continue to work with Reed's School on an occasional basis and in exchange for taking bees to meet the pupils they sent a small team of students to do some practical work in the apiary. After some basic instructions on how to use a spade they got stuck into the task and their teenage enthusiasm got a drainage trench dug next to the shed at an amazing speed. We will continue to develop this relationship.

We had another amazing week at the RHS Hampton Court Garden Festival with our extended observation hive drawing in gardeners which gave us the opportunity to talk about planting for pollinators and the potential threat from the Yellow Legged Hornet. The stand looked especially good this year as Emma Knivet's employer, The Cedar Nursery, loaned us a number of large planters that they had used at their RHS Chelsea display. It's hard to estimate the number of gardeners that we were able to talk to but it runs into thousands. The feedback that we received from our volunteer team was very positive and if invited we will certainly consider taking part next year. After an RHS review of their shows the festival will be changing to a biennial event.

Our social and ongoing learning events continue occasionally throughout the year and have covered designing and building Yellow Legged Hornet traps, though to the National Honey Monitoring Service and our apiary barbecue. Jane spends a great deal of time and effort trying to find suitable topics for presentations and she would be really pleased to receive suggestions for future events. Jane also manages our regular email communications via MailChimp. Some time ago we took the decision to take control of our communications, we recognised that frequent, random emails were annoying and ineffective. The weekly emails are carefully considered and edited, we also know if they have been opened.

It has been another successful year for the apiary and training team, Avis', the apiary manager's, report covers that in more detail. One of the targets on our development plan is to try to convert more of our trainee beekeepers to long term members, I hope that is beginning to take effect.

This is the fifth time that I have reported to the Association as chairman and looking back on my previous reports for inspiration it continues to impress me that we provide such consistent high quality support for our members, local beekeepers, but this doesn't happen by accident. KBKA works for, and because, of its members, this is my opportunity to formally thank some of these people. Thanks go to the committee for their continued support and hard work. Thanks to Keith for not only being the treasurer but also looking after our honey sales. Also to Kate who in addition to looking after the training bookings and membership has taken on the role of secretary and now tries to make some sense of our committee meeting discussions. I've already mentioned Jane and the work that she does to organise our social meetings and venue bookings. Bryn looks after our digital world ensuring that our website is accessible and Jem who picks up all of the practical stuff at the apiary and shows. Of course continued thanks to Avis, supported by David, for all of the work that she puts into the apiary and the training courses. This team does an amazing amount of work over the year.

Martyn Milner
Chair - Kingston Beekeepers Association

Apiary Managers Report

The winter of 2023/2024 was mild and there was no sustained cold weather period. The summer of 2023 was favourable for wasps and they were still being found in the colonies well into December. The wasp attack weakened the colonies and combined with a wet spring meant the hives were in a poor state and there was no spring honey this year. In fact they had barely recovered in time for the lime tree flow and there was only a crop of some 200 lbs of honey.

There were 20 beginners on the theory course over the winter, which was held at Imber Court and started in February. This was a new venue and start date, which proved very successful. Imber Court was much more comfortable and it meant the theory and the practical ran together smoothly rather than having a long break in between. Ten people continued to the practical course and attendance was good until the summer holiday season and then it was the usual pattern of absences as we all took advantage of the freedom to travel wherever we wanted.

The winter study course focused on Asian hornets, their life cycle, habits and then the making of traps by two skilled, inventive beekeepers, Jem and Steve. Attendance was excellent as everyone wanted to learn how to protect their bees and keep out AH. Fortunately for this year we had a reprieve and it was not a prolific season for AH.

There was only one candidate for the Basic Assessment Mari Siggins-Smith and it would be good to see more Kingston members undertaking this practical assessment as proof of being a competent beekeeper.

The swarm season was spasmodic as the wet weather took hold and then the bees lost interest in moving home. A queen rearing team however, produced the most queens and nucs Kingston has ever managed. There was enough to requeen the apiary colonies where necessary and the nucs replaced hives lost over the winter. We are going into this winter with 15 colonies.

The usual cycle of beekeeping activity continued, with comb replacement in the Spring, through to a successful extraction day in August, varroa treatment and then preparation for winter. The varroa treatment used this year was Formic Pro a new product based on formic acid. It was easy to use, not temperature dependent and required no extra equipment. However, there were some queen problems a few weeks later and it was difficult to ascertain whether it was the varroa treatment or other issues.

We are extremely grateful to Reed School for putting in a drainage channel on one side of the old metal shed to prevent it flooding. Ten students one Sunday morning made light work of digging a channel and filling it with gravel.

Chris Reid is sorely missed, we are still discovering just how much work he carried out in the background and are now trying to fill all the gaps.

The arborist returned to the apiary and removed branches on the oak trees. opening up a shady corner of the apiary and taking off an overhanging branch over the sheds. The hedge on Hampton Court Way side was trimmed and at long last is providing a solid barrier. An apiary tidy up day was recently held when the remaining trees and shrubs were pruned and the apiary is once again looking immaculate.

It has been a great pleasure to work with the apiary team, the beginners and all those who came along on Saturday afternoons. The primary objective is the running of a training apiary, which encompasses beginners, intermediates and queen rearing. Every year we aim to improve the standard of beekeeping and support our members in Kingston Division. New ideas and initiatives are always welcome. The season has been very enjoyable, friendly, fun and good team working to combat everything the weather and the bees threw at us.

Avis Marshall
KBKA Apiary Manager