

August 2023. Report from Fermanagh Beekeepers' Association



Ling in bloom



Frame of ling honey

August held no more promise than did July, with changeable conditions and, compared with other years, lower temperatures. This is the type of weather we must learn to expect and to deal with, as climate change takes more and more of a grip across the world. It has meant that beekeepers had to keep a close eye on their colonies to ensure that they had enough stores to survive and to rear brood capable of carrying them through the poor times. Here in Fermanagh, many beekeepers removed any honey stores that remained and fed their bees to ensure that they remained as free from stress as possible. However, the end of the month saw honey bees carrying pollen and nectar from, amongst other plants, Himalayan balsam, the last remnants of rosebay willow herb and the ever-faithful bramble which is still blooming in spite of having shown its face so early. In the west of Ulster, beekeepers who move colonies to ling have been amply rewarded as conditions, which are often challenging for the collection of heather honey, seem to have been ideal. Bees were filling frames, capping them with beautiful white wax and filling supers within a week. On a much lesser scale, honeybees have been foraging on the heathers in gardens! The ivy is coming into bloom with little yellow knots of flowers showing against the dark green leaves and I look forward to the aroma in the apiary in the next few days.

Beekeepers are often in ignorance as to the origin of the pollen which their bees collect. It adds to the enjoyment of watching bees flying into the hive to be able to identify which plants they are visiting from the colour of the pollen in their corbiculae. I would advise anyone who does not possess



Honeybee on balsam with white pollen on its body

a pollen colour chart to get one (or indeed several – as they get mislaid easily) from any of the bee supplies outlets before next spring. There are also many on the internet and, with a good printer to replicate the colours accurately, they would be useful. Unfortunately, many pollens are various shades of yellow and a good book to identify the trees or flowers in bloom at a particular time, is often necessary. I have used 'Wild Flowers of Britain' by Roger Phillips, published by Pan, for all of my beekeeping life. When I started beekeeping, the month in which a flower was photographed was often a month ahead of the time at which it bloomed in Fermanagh but over the years we seem to have caught up. Climate change in action again? This book is still available on the internet (second hand for less than £5, new £30 plus) but there are other similar books on the market. Identifying the forage available is only one way in which we become more closely aligned with nature when we decide to keep bees.



Áine Enright receiving the Howard McConnell plaque for the tastiest honey from Jim Fletcher

Fermanagh Beekeepers' Association Annual Honey Show was held on Sunday 27th August at Florencecourt House and was open to the public on Monday 28th August. Entries were down on last year but this was to be expected with the season's poor weather. In spite of almost continuous rain on the two days, the show was well attended with a good flow of people looking at the honey, wax, honey cakes and mead, as well as the bee-related craft items and photographs. As usual, the observation hive proved a popular attraction especially as stickers proclaiming 'I found the queen!' were given out!

Wendy Buchanan (Honey Show Secretary) received and recorded the entries with Teresa McVeigh and Jackie Barry staging them. Jim Fletcher was once again our Honey Judge with Teresa and Jacky acting

as his stewards. The trophies were awarded as follows:

Moore Cup for a frame of honey ready for extraction: Thomas McCaffrey.

McConnell Shield for the tastiest honey: Áine Enright – this is the first time the trophy was awarded
FBKA Cup for medium honey was not awarded.

Dessie Flanagan Cup for extracted honey (Novice) no entries.

Vaughan Cup for highest aggregate points: Charlie Dunleavy.

Dickie and Sons Annual Prize for 2 sections of honey: Paddy Galligan.

Paddy was also awarded best exhibit in Show for his sections.

In his concluding remarks, Jim was very complimentary to Fermanagh and said how much he had looked forward to coming to FBKA Honey Show over the years. Members have always enjoyed Jim sharing his knowledge and have appreciated the advice which he freely imparted when asked. Stephen Hey, Chairman FBKA, thanked Jim for giving of his time and expertise, Wendy for all her work in organising the Show, Teresa and Jackie for their marathon in staging and stewarding and all

who helped setting up tables, lighting etc. A Honey Show would not be complete without honey for sale and Stephen also thanked those who supplied honey.

Ulster Beekeepers' Association Honey Show and Annual general Meeting will be held at the Greenmount Campus of Cafre on October 7th and we would encourage members to study the show schedule and enter as many classes as they can.

The Queen Rearing Group has finished work for the 2023 season. It has been a difficult year, opening hives and manipulating the bees so that queen cell starters and finishers had the correct formations, in all weathers, putting bees under stress. The weather had an effect on the mating of the virgin queens. There was a couple of weeks towards the end of July when bees seemed reluctant to finish the queen cells but then the urge to rear queens returned. Was this due to weather or to a natural easing off of the need to rear brood at that time of year? Wasps were a problem, plaguing both full colonies and the queen mating apideas and destroying some of the latter before the danger was fully realised. In spite of all the drawbacks the number of queens raised was higher than expected and each member of the group experienced a steep but valuable learning curve. The group worked well as a team but like all teams needed a good leader – thank you Thomas.

We would ask anyone who has an opportunity to examine the brood in their colonies to be extra vigilant as there has been a large increase in the numbers of colonies with European Foul Brood in August in some parts of Ulster. The first warning sign to look for is empty cells scattered over a brood frame where bees have removed diseased larvae and this should alert the beekeeper to have a closer look at any uncapped brood which, if healthy, should be C-shaped, filling the brood cell, pearly white and with clear segmentation. Any doubts and a sample should be sent to AFBI and the bee inspector should be informed. Contact details can be found on the Daera and AFBI websites.

The next meeting of FBKA will be on Thursday 29th September 2023 at 8.00pm in Fermanagh House. Lorraine will email details of the speaker and topic to all members.