

November 2022. Report from Fermanagh Beekeepers' Association



Bee on Mahonia 27th November 2022



Some members of the working party in the apiary



Witch hazel in spring bloom

The first half of November has seen our honeybees flying strongly and continuing to bring in copious amounts of pollen, giving a huge clue as to what is happening in the hives. Brood is being reared. On the plus side, it does reassure the beekeeper that queens are, most likely, still alive and performing as they should but this is a two edged sword. Most seriously perhaps, it leads to the *Varroa* mite also breeding. The adult female, mated mites enter the brood cells just prior to the cells being sealed by the bees and, in time, lay their own eggs which hatch and proceed to join their mother feeding on the fat bodies of the developing bee pupae. The bee which ultimately hatches will not be as robust as she should be, reducing her effectiveness in spring. It means that there should be younger bees with the ability to give the colonies a strong start to next spring but, with the increase in the *Varroa* load and its effects on them, will they be prove to be advantageous to the colony? After our mild weather last winter, many beekeepers saw a larger than usual number of mites in the colony early in the summer. There were also more reports of colonies with bees with deformed wings. Having to reduce the number of mites led to extra work for the beekeeper at a very busy time of year when they should have been able to concentrate on other aspects of their management. It will definitely be worthwhile to put the insert under the open mesh floor for about a week in early December to find out what the daily drop is. If it is 1 or more the colony should be treated with the approved medication for the time of year. It should be noted that this treatment does not penetrate the cappings of the brood cells so, ideally, should be used when no brood is present (a condition which will be met only after a long, cold spell) for the product to work at its highest efficiency. Consequently, extra vigilance re *Varroa* will still be needed next season.

Brood rearing requires a great deal of effort on the part of the bees, which, in turn means that they consume stores faster than if there was no brood in the hive. It also means that there will be more bees to feed over the next few months. So make sure that, amongst your other essential winter checks mentioned last month, you evoke the, mysterious to some, practice of hefting.

A winter activity which would benefit, not only the environment in which we live but also pollinators in our immediate locality, is the planting of trees and shrubs which we know will provide pollen and nectar. The flowers, the leaves of some plants, even the architectural structure of bare branches in winter and identifying of the winged visitors will all give us pleasure. The pollinators will benefit, especially those queen bumble bees and solitary bees which emerge early from their winter nests, hungry and preparing to breed, if we plant for spring blossom. Even if every gardener added only one

productive shrub or tree or every patio had an extra flowering shrub in a pot, it would make a difference. We have a mahonia which is in full bloom at the moment and as we stood and marvelled that we could see the honeybees on it and even hear the buzz as they worked it, a huge bumble flew into view and explored the florets. I don't think I have ever seen a bumble queen forage in November before. The fruits resulting from all this pollination give an extra bonus – the birds devour the berries.

Fermanagh Beekeepers' Association, in conjunction with CAFRE and Open College Network, runs an 'Introduction to Beekeeping' course for those wishing to take up beekeeping. The course, which is tutored by Jackie Barry, will begin early February in 2023 and consists of seven theory sessions, most probably by Zoom, followed by sessions in the apiary which give the opportunity for handling of bees in a safe and supervised environment. Instruction at the hives will be given by experienced beekeepers, under the lead of Jackie. It provides a good basic knowledge of beekeeping which allows the new beekeeper to examine his bees with confidence and secure in the knowledge that he will have the support of FBKA members. If you are interested, visit the Cafre site at www.cafre.ac.uk and type beekeeping in the search bar. You will find more details here, be able to register an interest in the course and, when registration is opened, you will be contacted by Cafre.

David Bolton, who leads the Wild Bee Project, is anxious to learn of any colonies of honeybees living in old buildings, trees or other places in Fermanagh so that they can be mapped and added to the data which has already been collected. This is probably not a good time of year to get, for the first time, a sighting of colonies which are living without interference from man but if anyone has any knowledge from summer observations please contact David or any member of Fermanagh Beekeepers' Association or by email at info.fermanaghbeekeepers@gmail.com

We would remind all members that membership fees are due in December. If direct debit has already been arranged with William Martin, our honorary treasurer, there is no need to worry but if anyone wishes to sign up for a direct debit, please contact William to arrange it. Membership also includes the affiliation fee to the Ulster Beekeepers' Association and third party insurance, which is essential in these days of litigation. William also organises bulk purchasing of honey jars, syrup and fondant which only members can purchase at the reduced rates. The Association also has purchased equipment which can be used in the apiary house or, if portable, borrowed and used at home. Not least amongst the benefits of membership is the wealth of experience and knowledge which is freely imparted on WhatsApp or at meetings.

The Ulster Beekeepers Association will hold its Annual Conference in CAFRE, Greenmount Campus, Antrim on Friday 17th and Saturday 18th February 2023. The theme is Building Sustainable Beekeeping and the keynote speaker will be Professor Juliana Rangel of Texas A and M University. There will be lectures from a wide range of well-qualified speakers in addition to a number of workshops directed towards beekeepers at every level of experience. Booking is already open and further information can be obtained by emailing ubkaconference@gmail.com

At our November meeting, two of our beekeepers who have two summer seasons experience with their bees, told us of their experiences. Adam Crockett and John McCrea explained how they had coped with the unexpected circumstances which they had met. They did so with humour and described a remarkable amount of good beekeeping practice. Older members appreciated hearing 'that swarm couldn't possibly have come from my hives' and were reminded of their own start-up as the new hive was likened to a new baby being checked by anxious parents every few minutes to make sure it was still alive!

Following on, Lorraine Wild gave a presentation on research into honey bee diseases which she had compiled from scientific papers. It was pertinent in that some of the papers had been based on samples of bees sent from apiaries all over Ireland and it was obvious that, for example, European

Foul Brood could be probably found at low levels in many apiaries. The beekeeper does not detect it as bees have evolved a strategy to deal with it and can remove the evidence i.e. the affected larvae. The presence of various pathogens, and the levels at which they are present, in bees, brood and eggs was also shown and Lorraine emphasised the need for strict hygiene in all aspects of our beekeeping. This stimulated discussion which included the mention of the use of pesticides and their long term effects on bee colonies.

The next meeting of FBKA will be held on January 26th 2023 in the Enniskillen Hotel at 7.30pm and will be the Annual General Meeting of the Association. We would ask as many as possible to attend so that the views of members can be taken into account as a new programme of meetings is planned. It will be followed by the Annual Dinner, always a lively and enjoyable affair fuelled by the excellent food served up by the Hotel. Anyone interested in attending the dinner, please contact Lorraine at info.fermanagh@gmail.com Significant others will be very welcome.