

January 2026. Report from Fermanagh Beekeepers Association



Andy Loizides: outgoing Secretary, Jackie Barry: Chair, Wendy Buchanan: incoming Secretary, Kelley Harris: Vice-Chair, William Martin: Treasurer

January was an incredibly wet month with only a couple of hours sunshine on, maybe, a couple of days, in Fermanagh. All we could do was hope that our honeybees were able to nip out for cleansing flights during the few suitable spells although there have been a couple of reports of bees carrying in pollen from, presumably, whins. In gardens Christmas roses, quince japonica, snowdrops, some species of camellia and a few brave crocuses are amongst the plants in bloom but low temperatures and rain have meant that bees did not fly from the hives. Indeed, light levels have been so low that my crocuses flowers have not even opened fully.

The mesh floors mean that the debris, which results from bees uncapping honey stores to use them, will fall beneath the colony telling us that the bees are still alive and it even gives an indication of where they are in the hive, should we need to know. We continued to heft our hives to make sure that each colony had an adequate supply of stores. Fondant was given where it was necessary. Putting it into the hives takes very little s.time as it can be administered via the feed holes in the crown board without disturbing the bees by removing the crown boards. If the weather is very frosty, meaning that the bees will be in a tight cluster and unable to move towards the food, check the debris as above to indicate the position of the cluster, quickly remove the crown board and place the fondant above the bees. It is important to have everything ready to make the procedure as fast as possible. It is not kind to allow heat to escape from the hive and the daylight will also disturb the clustering bees. They can make use of it instantly and should never be given sugar syrup, which requires processing and may ferment leading to problems with dysentery later, at this time of year.

The Association has been busy. Apiary manager, Niall, has been making external inspections at regular intervals to check stores, soundness of hives, and predator and storm damage. He also extracted and jarred the Association honey with the help of Lorraine Wild. This latter was a mammoth task this year as a result of our exceptional summer and adds a considerable sum to the Association

finances (the fact that it has all been sold reflects the importance of local honey to the local population). Members were invited to join with Clogher Valley Association to hear Colm O'Neill and Jonathon Getty speaking. The success was such that it was agreed that this should be an annual event with Fermanagh Beekeepers arranging the 2026 event. Our students for the 'Introduction to Beekeeping' Level 1 course were awarded their certificates, with Matthew Littleford, giving an account of his experiences in his first year. At the same meeting, the Beginner of the Year Shield for 2024 – 2025 was awarded to Matthew Littleford. The shield recognises the involvement in both the classes at Level 1 and association activities. The decision as to the winner is always a difficult one due to the enthusiasm of the students. When the Level 3 class reached the section in their syllabus concerning the anatomy of the honeybee, tutor Jackie arranged a practical session, using microscopes owned by members of the Association, in Cafre Enniskillen. The session proved to be popular, allowing students to see the parts, internal and external, of the bee in detail as well as the opportunity for discussion.



Members of level 1 course receive their awards with Tutor Lorraine Wild (left) and Chair Jackie Barry (right)

At the microscope

The Annual General Meeting was held in January in the Westville Hotel in Enniskillen. Secretary Andy Loizides, Treasurer William Martin and Chairperson Jackie Barry, all gave reports which reflected the healthy state of the Association and its contribution to the local community. Members attended local events, schools, diverse clubs and fairs to talk about the life of the honeybee and the benefits it brings to everyone. On education, the UBKA Levels 1 and 3 courses, are being delivered by teams of qualified tutors, thus spreading the load in what can be an onerous, though enjoyable, task. Tributes were paid to Brian Dane who had, unaided, taught the Level 3 for several years.

The updated version of our Constitution was passed. Thanks were given to the Staff of the Enniskillen Campus of Cafre for their continued support and provision of access to the apiary. The following were elected to serve on committee:-

Chairperson: Jackie Barry
Vice-chair: Kelley Harris
Secretary: Wendy Buchanan
Treasurer: William Martin.

Committee Members: David Bolton, Brian Dane, Noel McAllister, Thomas McCaffrey and Lorraine Wild with others being seconded as necessary.

The Annual Dinner followed with each attendee being given a 'goody' bag containing, amongst other things, packets of wild flower seeds tailored to our county, and, most importantly, instructions on how to plant them! Thanks to Kelley for sourcing the funding and arranging this unexpected gift.

2025 brought news that the pest we had all been dreading, the yellow legged hornet, had reached Irish shores with the last sighting being in Northern Ireland (Dundonald). The Northern Ireland Environment Agency are to be commended on the speed at which the nest was tracked down and destroyed but we, beekeepers and non-beekeepers, must be aware of its appearance, life cycle and feeding habits which are much the same as our native wasps with a few differences. It is larger than our common native wasps but smaller than the wood wasp with it's ominous-looking but harmless ovipositor and looks like a wasp but it has a dark body with just one yellow band. Its most distinctive feature is its yellow legs. **If you think you have seen a yellow legged hornet report it, along with the location, to either the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs or to the Northern Ireland Environment Agency.** If possible, take a photograph but **do not attempt to catch it** - it's sting is more powerful than that of a common wasp. This last is especially important in the case of those who are allergic to wasp stings. Spring, when the queens are building up numbers in their primary nests and there are fewer leaves on the trees, is one of the periods of time to be watchful, even though there is no evidence as yet to suggest that queens have overwintered in Northern Ireland.

The next meeting will be held in Fermanagh House on Thursday 26th February at 8.00pm. The speaker will be Thomas McCaffrey. Thomas is the mentor for the queen rearing group and he will give details of the 2025 season and its outcomes as well as explaining what is entailed for the individual member, what the benefits are for our native black bee and for the Association. All will be welcome to attend.