

## Hive Talk October 2011

This month began warm, mild and fairly dry with quite a number of daytime opportunities for bees to fly and continue foraging, but it is ending in a deluge. Much of Ireland - with us in the north having the worst of it – Scotland and northwest England has had well above average rainfall with as much as 24mm – 27mm falling locally in a day. But the east and southeast of England is experiencing drought conditions; winter wheat planted in the English east midlands and toward the southeast has failed to show through for lack of rain and fields that should by now be a rich sea of green remain defiantly grey, brown and dusty! And we are likely to see more of this more localised and extreme weather as the planet warms up – yes it's official, the climate-change sceptics have to accept the uncomfortable truth that the earth is getting warmer largely as a result of human activity, and in particular from the burning of fossil fuels and other activities that contribute to an increase in so called greenhouse gasses. The implications for beekeeping in this part of the world are not good. Long-term climate records indicate clearly that May is our sunniest and driest month; this year was the exception. We had a mild and dry April but May was cool, windy and wet and overall contributed to a relatively poor year for the successful rearing of queens – or more accurately, the successful mating of queens. Virgin queens and the drones that make up the other half of the genetic partnership need warm, dry and still conditions over two or three days to allow for successful and complete mating to take place. May is usually the month when beekeepers intent on rearing queens and increasing their bee stocks concentrate their activities. Most have a view to producing their first crop of mated queens by the end of the month. This year the poor weather severely impacted on this process; the rest of the summer was not particularly good either and so the quality of queens produced has been generally poor with a high number of failures resulting from less than adequate mating. It is interesting though, that the honey crop has been reasonably good for most people. In many parts this has been connected to the abundance of Himalayan balsam, not only because it is a generous source of nectar, but also because it has a flowering period that can last well into September. The extended season of the Himalayan balsam can help to make up for the days when the bees have been unable fly and flowers have been inhibited in their production of nectar. Some people would say there is no such thing as 'good weather' or 'bad weather' only 'weather'. It would be nice to agree with them but we are all only too aware that the weather can have good effects and equally it can have bad effects – and all too often it is the latter we are more aware of!

We can all do our bit to reduce the emissions that are contributing to global warming by driving a bit less, turning the lights off that are not needed, turning the heating down a little, but we are stuck with the climatic conditions that prevail. This corner of the world has always had a wet oceanic climate – at least since the last ice age around 10,000 years ago – it is just that it is getting a little wetter and more extreme. We, and our bees have simply to persevere. But whilst we can have no immediate effect on our climate we can help mitigate its effects by being more proactive in terms of how we manage our

landscape. Our bees would do consistently better if there was adequate forage for them. Modern farming methods have had the effect of reducing the number of plant species available to our bees and to other insects with the result that honey yields have been falling year on year and the vigour of our bees has been in decline. In the last couple of years there has been an upsurge in interest in bees and beekeeping and this has helped to some degree to offset this general trend but it does not address the underlying problem. There is a need for those of us in a position to do so to take action to improve the forage opportunities for all nectar gathering insects by re-planting hedges where they have been neglected and then managing them in such a way that they are encouraged to produce flowers and fruit; to plant trees and sow seed for flowering ground cover plants in marginal ground and around headlands and to examine the possibilities of managing grassland with reduced nitrate levels allowing and encouraging the re-growth of natural clovers or by oversowing with new seed. Where once we were all able to enjoy the benefits of white clover in our fields, it has all but disappeared. The application of slurry has a clover depressing effect and this is clearly a major problem. It is interesting that here in the north we have come to rely of late on the invasive exotic Himalayan balsam to boost our honey yields, whilst many beekeepers in the south of Ireland, particularly those in Tipperary and Cork, are getting most of their honey from white clover. It may be that the interpretation and actions taken in respect of the EU nitrates directive are different to here, but whatever it is, clover in the south has made a significant comeback. It would be a wonderful boost to our bees and to beekeeping if the same thing were to happen here!

Winter is not quite with us yet, though it is not far away and temperatures are definitely falling. The change in the weather toward lower temperatures means that the bees have to work harder if they are required to reduce the water content through evaporation of any feed syrup given to them. This can result in stress to the bees and weakens them making them more susceptible to opportunistic diseases. So the short answer is: no more feeding. Stressed bees can mean dead bees. The best insulation for bees is bees and so it is important to have as many bees as possible to help the colony survive the winter. If synthetic pyrethroid strips have been placed in the hives, these should be removed after six weeks have elapsed. Mouse guards should be in place to prevent any mice from gaining entry and taking up residence – it is a good idea to check first to make sure that there are no unwanted guests already there. Apart from maybe adding the odd brick or rock to help keep the roof on there is little else to be done except to keep an eye on the hives to make sure they are not blown over or knocked over by livestock – or vandals! For those who may be managing their Varroa by the application of oxalic acid, this will need to be done toward the end of November and into December when the queen is most likely to have stopped laying and consequently the colony is more or less broodless. Oxalic acid is generally not toxic to bees but it does kill brood; this is why it is necessary to apply it when there is no or little brood in the hive. The traditional view was that bees should left alone and undisturbed throughout the winter, and there is general agreement that any manipulation results in stress to the bees and so should be kept to a minimum and only for good reasons; and yet the oxalic acid treatment requires the

colony to be opened up just as the winter is really beginning to bite. It is probable that opening the hive at this time will be stressful and have a detrimental effect but the effects of not treating the bees in this way will have a greater detrimental effect and increase morbidity through greater susceptibility to viruses and bacterial infections.

Last winter saw the introduction to beekeeping education being conducted by individual Associations and this winter the same opportunities will apply. The Preliminary Beekeeping course is aimed at those with an interest in beekeeping, or those who may be thinking of keeping bees. It covers the basics of beekeeping from setting up an apiary and acquiring bees to health & safety, hive management, swarm control, disease control and honey production. The minimum age for candidates participating in these courses is 16 years old. Courses will normally run for 10 sessions, one per week, beginning in January 2012. There will be 7 evening classroom sessions followed by three practical beekeeping sessions in the apiary in late April or early May when it becomes warm enough to manipulate bees. The following Associations affiliated to the Ulster Beekeepers Association are offering places on the Federation of Irish Beekeepers Preliminary course in Beekeeping:

<b>Local BKA</b>	<b>Course Location</b>	<b>When</b>	<b>Contact</b>
<b>Belfast and District BKA</b>	<b>Aslan Centre, 13a Knocknagoney Rd, Belfast BT4 2NR</b>	<b>7.30 Tuesday starting 21st February 2012</b>	<b>Alan Rea, 12 Kirkliston Drive, Belfast, BT5 5NX 02890654150 bbkasecretary@googlemail.com</b>
<b>Dromore BKA. Co Down</b>	<b>The Science Research Centre, Dromore High School,</b>	<b>7.30pm Monday starting 9<sup>th</sup> January 2012</b>	<b>Norman Walsh, 43 Edentrillick Rd. Hillsborough BT26 6PG 028 92682578 norman@walsh43.plus.com</b>
<b>Fermanagh BKA</b>	<b>Enniskillen Campus of CAFRE</b>	<b>7.30pm Monday starting 16<sup>th</sup> January 2012</b>	<b>Andrew Elliott, Lenamoyle, Florencecourt, Enniskillen BT92 1DZ. 028 66 348740 yv_elli504@hotmail.com</b>
<b>Killinchy BKA</b>	<b>Community Centre, 16 Lisbarnett Rd. Lisbane, COMBER Co Down BT23 5NF</b>	<b>Starting on Tuesday 17<sup>th</sup> January at 7.30pm</b>	<b>Phelim Breen, 63 Beechcroft Park, Newtownards, BT23 8QL. 028 9181 6884 phelim_b@hotmail.com</b>
<b>Mid Antrim BKA</b>	Unable to deliver a class in 2012 due to relocation of the apiary.		
<b>Mid Ulster BKA</b>	<b>Loughry Campus, CAFRE, Cookstown</b>	<b>Monday evenings starting mid Jan 2012</b>	<b>Ernie Watterson, Flowermill Hill Coalisland Rd Dungannon BT71 6EP 028 87748640 thewattersons@dslpipex.com or John Ross 19 Dunamoney</b>

			Rd Dungannon BT70 1PA 07512453424 johnross@ukgateway.net
<b>R&amp;DBKA</b>	<b>Greenmount Campus, CAFRE Antrim</b>	<b>Tuesday at 7.30pm, Starting 7<sup>th</sup> Feb2011</b>	<b>Susie Turner 7Nutts Corner Rd. Crumlin BT294BW tel 07920 231227 susie-bee@hotmail.co.uk</b>
<b>Roe Valley BKA</b>	<b>Limavady Community Development Initiative</b>	<b>Tuesday, 24<sup>th</sup> January, 2012</b>	<b>Dave Atherton, 15, Temple Road, Enagh Lough, Derry/Londonderry, BT47 6TJ 028 7186 0075 davedrone@hotmail.com</b>
<b>Rostrevor &amp; Warrenpoint BKA</b>	<b>Sweet Pea Café, Annett's Garden Centre, Warrenpoint</b>	<b>7.30pm Monday 30<sup>th</sup> January 2012</b>	<b>Christina Joyce, "The Grange", 1 Mourn Park, Kilkeel, Co Down, BT34 4LB. beespoint@yahoo.co.uk 077 56392715</b>

More detailed information including detail on fees may be found by visiting the UBKA website at [www.ubka.org](http://www.ubka.org) Anyone interested will be welcome as no previous experience is required.