

2020_2021 Secretary's report

2020 was marked by the Coronavirus pandemic: travel was restricted, although livestock care was permitted. Beekeeping activities were limited: apiary management was restricted to 2 beekeepers (for safety) working well apart: tools and clothing were scrupulously cleaned afterwards. Members were reminded about the latest restrictions, and asked to arrange alternative care for their bees in case of illness.

We did manage a beginner's course - taught online to 22, via zoom and with filmed inspections at the apiary, saved on PBKA YouTube channel (all by Peter Stevenson). We also collaborated with Newbattle BKA for evening talks and (filmed) apiary inspections. Peter became very adept at setting this up, and gave all our beginners' talks from April through to September, via Zoom (with some very creative apiary re-enactments in his garden!). Slight easing of restrictions in late summer meant a few beginners were able to get some hands-on apiary experience.

The Covid travel restrictions meant a quieter environment, and great improvement in air quality: it was possible to smell the blossoms as each came into bloom.

2020 saw the hottest driest April for years but also the coldest May overnight temperature for 20 years: colonies built up quickly in May and June, but most of June was wet, as was August. The lime harvest was poor, and there was little heather honey but clover did well. Honey yield was about 20lbs per hive, in most areas.

Drones did not appear in numbers until at least the second or third week in May: colonies were already well built up. There followed a week of very cold weather but as soon as it warmed up queen cells appeared and beekeepers carried out swarm prevention. Only a few swarms were reported, these were all successfully collected by volunteers.

Forage was not plentiful, with some colonies lacking stores by autumn. Fondant went on in September, rather than December: many colonies had gone through their fondant by December, and a second order had to be placed - unheard of. Members were encouraged to treat their bees for varroa within the same fortnight (mostly oxalic acid-based); this and the additional feeding resulted in few winter colony losses (so far). Varroa was present in all hives but in low numbers – some hives exhibiting no mite drop for several months over the summer.

The Association apiary produced several colonies for beginners, and at least one over-wintered nuc: members' honey was sold at the food market on Peebles High Street (one person at a time, due to Covid).

As always, the Association was heavily reliant on members who freely offered their skills and time to keep the Association and new beekeepers going. We have great hopes for 2021!

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