

1923 - 2020



Medway
Beekeepers
Association

Medway Beekeepers Association

Celebrating over 95 years of support for beekeeping
and beekeepers in and around the Medway Towns



Newsletter February 2020

This is a quiet month but we do need to heft and check the stores. Feed fondant and pollen patties if you think your bees are getting low on food. Don't forget to put the AGM date into your diary.

Past Event:

Saturday 18th January 2020

Indoor Meeting: Margret Ginman – General Secretary of The Bee Farmers Association, the professional body for bee farmers.



Margret Ginman talked with her usual enthusiasm, about **The Business of Bee Farming**.

She began by explaining that she has never kept bees herself and was employed by the Bee Farmers for her business experience. As a little aside she explained that most of her experience comes from running a successful lighting business. If you have travelled on the London Underground her company has provided the light fittings that made your journey not only possible but safe. She has worked for the Bee Farmers for 10 years and is involved in making beekeeping for profit possible; the definition of which is income derived in part or wholly from beekeeping.

To make a living from keeping bees you are looking at tending 100+ hives in the UK, 150+ hives in the EU and 30,000+ in the USA. Very different to the hobbyist with 2 to 10 hives. To be a bee farmer you need around 40 hives in order to make it pay.

One of her roles is to attract young people into what is an ageing industry as indeed is farming generally. To do this you need a business model that makes money. You work long hours in the summer and many hours of not working during the winter. So many of the youngsters spend the summer working in the UK and the winter months on the other side of the world in New Zealand and Australia, so that they earn all year round.

In the EU there is a tradition of co-operative working. For example, when you move your hives to the sunflower crop you also move your neighbours. When you extract your honey, you do it at a centralised site along with other bee farmers. The average age of a bee farmer 10 years ago was 66 years, the apprenticeship scheme is attracting a number of younger people and even 40-year olds who see this as an opportunity to earn a second income. This over time will hopefully reduce the average age within the industry.

Bee Farmers will sell many products from their hives, honey and wax but also propolis, mead and pollination services. They also diverge into selling bee equipment and clothing as well

as offering training, giving talks and running courses. To sell 50lb of honey per month throughout the year you need 40 + hives and of course somewhere to put them. Most bee farmers do not own land and rely on a business relationship between the landowner and themselves.

If you are working 40 to 100 hives and they all need inspecting on a weekly rotation you need to be able to inspect colonies very quickly and accurately. Many can complete an inspection in as little as 5 minutes. Hobbyists often take 30 minutes because they enjoy it so much. You may need to employ staff to help you. 40 to 100 hives, requires one part time person, 101 to 250 requires one full timer, 251 to 400 one full and one part time, 400 to 1000 takes 3 full time staff and for those with more than 1000 it takes many staff to look after them.

Apprentices provide a useful source of part time staff during the summer months and during the winter they head to New Zealand to earn their income there.

The UK's biggest bee farmers are found in Scotland where heather honey commands a price of £18 a pound. However, they need a lot of expensive equipment to handle and move so many bees. A large vehicle can cost around £150,000 and to attend to 3,500 hives you need 12 staff. The very least you will need is a 4 x 4 complete with a trailer, as many apiaries are off the beaten track. Bee farming can be a very lonely occupation and for health and safety reasons many work together. You do not make a fortune working with bees. You do it for the life style and an average living. The more successful farmers sell honey by the ton and one has an extraction plant, which is used for 3 weeks a year, costing £100,000. You need to produce a lot of honey to sustain that level of investment! If you sell in bulk you need specialist kit such as a forklift to move and stack the barrels.

Not all bee farmers sell in bulk many sell in jars and so need bottling and labelling plant as well as marketing expertise.

Finally, Margret outlined the potential market for honey sales in this country. We spend £149 million which equates to over 40,000 tons of honey and yet we only produce 6,600 tons (2008 figures). This is a big shortfall and offers a very large market in which to produce and sell honey. She also noted that beeswax has around 250 different uses, areas as diverse as cosmetics and weaving being just 2 examples. Even mead is making a comeback and is now produced commercially by the Northumberland Honey Company.

This was a very interesting afternoon spent with an excellent speaker

Our thanks to Margaret for another fascinating talk on the world of commercial beekeeping which is far removed from the world that most of us live in.

Paul Lawrence



Many congratulations to the following members who have achieved success in the recent BBKA Module Examinations:

Sonia Belsey Module 1 (Credit), **Christine Dudley** Module 1 (Distinction), **Jennifer Ferry** Module 5, **Jane Howells** Module 1, and **Archie McLellan** Module 1

February's Events and Meetings:

Monday 3rd February 2020

Winter Study Group 8

Time: 7.00pm (7.30pm start)

Venue: Wainscott Community Hall, 16 – 18 Holly Road, Wainscott, ME2 4

February's Events and Meetings (cont.)

Saturday 15th February 2020 MBKA Annual General Meeting

Time: 2 – 5pm

Venue: Wainscott Community Hall, 16 – 18 Holly Road, Wainscott, ME2 4L

The papers for this year's AGM will be available for download in the **Member's Area** very soon.

Please note: In order to take part and to vote at this meeting all subscriptions must be paid in full and be with the Treasurer before the 15th February.

PLEASE REMEMBER: NO SUBSCRIPTION PAID AND CASHED BY THE TREASURER MEANS, NO VOTING RIGHTS AT THE AGM.

Monday 17th February 2020 Winter Study Group 9

Time: 7.00pm (7.30pm start)

Venue: Wainscott Community Hall, 16 – 18 Holly Road, Wainscott, ME2 4

Wednesday 26th February 2020 Bee Chat

Come and share your stories and hear everyone else's!

4th Wednesday of the month at The Pier, Lower Upnor, ME2 4XA, at 7.30pm.

Reading Around:



A monthly glance at a topic or two in the media with Archie McLellan.

This month: Having failed twice already, slatted racks finally make an appearance. But is there any good reason to bother with them? What about the new UD Inrance then, why would you do away with any floor level entrance at all. Master beekeeper and presenter from the University of Guelph, Paul Kelly, makes it all look so easy, the talking and the handling of the bees. Plus, The Guardian, BBC radio, Ron Miksha and, for a wee laugh, David Evans.

To view this month's edition please: [Click here](#)

BBKA Basic Beekeeping Assessment 2020:

Are you interested in gaining the BBKA Basic Certificate?

Help will be available this year as in 2019, we will be running revision and at-the-hive coaching sessions for this important first step on the BBKA Exams sequence. If you have kept bees for a full season and would like to join this group, please let Jen know.

Email; jen.ferry@medwaybeekeepers.co.uk Details available on the [Member's Area](#).

Dates to be arranged depending on availability and weather but probably in May/June.

Website Update:

Some Member's have experienced difficulties when logging into the Member's Area and when resetting passwords. The system had a glitch but a recent upgrade of the software seems to have cured it. Your login details are sent via the 'Wordpress' software not from me,

so if necessary check your junk mail for the email. However, please let me know of any difficulties you may have when using the system and I will reset your password manually.

Now that we have established our Member's Area, the Public Website will be undergoing changes to make it both more pertinent to non-members and easier for members to navigate to other areas, such as the Member's Area. Watch out for the latest updates.

Paul Lawrence (Website Manager)

Facebook:

Join our Facebook page for information, updates and events:

<https://www.facebook.com/medwaybka/>

Next Year's Meetings:

A full list of next year's meetings can be viewed by going to the Member's Website: [click here](#)

And Finally:

Many thanks to all who have contributed to the newsletter. Please remember if anyone has any news, ideas, amusing stories or comments or indeed suggestions about the websites or for any future newsletter, please get in touch with me, Paul Lawrence at the address shown below, we really do appreciate your input.

Contact Details:

Chairman

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Newsletter and Website Enquiries

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