



# Preveiling Wind

Autumn 2021

Kendal and South Westmorland Beekeepers Association Newsletter

We have just been down to Wales to visit Rosie's family who live in Cwm Pennant, which translated means 'valley of the end of the stream'. It is a long valley that winds up towards Snowdon but is nicely quiet as it is a dead end. Bronny, Rosie's eldest sister who keeps bees, asked me if I'd help her move a newly hived swarm to the neighbouring valley to a friend's house where they would stay for a couple of weeks before being brought back and put in a different position on her land. Bronny is 81 but you get the feeling that the bees know that she is still firmly in charge. Her friend lives at the top of a slate mining village. The row of small houses are terraced and set into the side of the mountain just below the Dorothea mines. Late in the evening we carried the bees up the steep front garden, through the 'steep' cottage, and then up the steep back garden putting the hive on a ledge at waist height, next to the old stone built slate roofed toilet. The whole experience reeked of history and harder times. We sat down and took in the panorama of the north side of the Nantlle Ridge opposite, the view of Snowdon, and reflected on the temporary home that the bees had been brought to, as the light began to fail. We pondered the lives of those who had lived here before. On the way round, in the car, Bronny told me about how she first saw Cwm Pennant when her parents bought the farm there over 60 years ago, which helped her decide to start keeping bees. I asked her to write down these memories. I took the liberty of adding the title myself.

## **How Green Was my Valley .... a message from the heart.**

As a teenager I first came into the valley and saw the high banks and trees which lined the road in 1957. It was a magical experience with much of the single track road going up towards the farm encased by leafy tunnels of ancient oaks, ash, willow, hawthorn, blackthorn and hazel arched high above. Mosses and ferns thrived below. It felt like never-never-land and still does to this day. The world's worries slough off my back each time I return home. In between these green mysterious secret places and where sunlight burst through, a riot of wildflowers thrived through the seasons. Bluebells, stitchwort, white valerian, windflower, campions, foxgloves, wild roses, bramble, Welsh poppies, followed by the hawkbit families, ladies bedstraw, meadowsweet and meadow buttercup. Cutting happened once a year laboriously by one man with a sickle and a forked stick. In around 1960 catastrophe struck when a rogue council worker sprayed the full length of the valley on both sides with weed killer. Heads rolled but that was of no avail to the poor roadside which has struggled back over decades, but which, despite some sections having regained some of their glory, are beset by inappropriate cutting. Bracken and nettles are a curse requiring specialist treatment which they don't get. Beekeepers know

better than most, that if you cut before seed can ripen, plants will die out. I am still trying to persuade the local council to cut by season and not by date. A difficult task. Farmers have cut trees and bushes to enable bigger and bigger vehicles to get through. Great trees fall in the storms and now the stately ashes seem on the way out. The greenwood tunnels are a shadow of their former selves. There is better news on the hill pastures, however, where de-stocking of grazers has enabled a vast array of low growing flowers to flourish such that one suddenly comes across blue carpets of tiny self heal and harebell, celandine, white patches of clover and the yellow swathes of tormentil. At the margins, ladies smock and woundwort are beginning to thrive and grow to full height. All food for insects. Even better for me as a beekeeper and my bees, is a whole hillside planted as a woodland set-aside 15 years ago. It is now an impenetrable vast thicket of bramble and young trees where only insects and small creatures can go. One day the trees will reach a size where their shade cuts back those sun loving plants, to be replaced by ferns and mosses. I hope the bramble sees me out.....

**Bronwen**

### **Leaf-cutter bees by Jane and Rob**

You may well see a bee foraging in your garden that looks superficially like a honeybee, but on closer inspection has an orange furry tummy. You could be looking at the Patchwork leaf-cutter bee. These are our most common garden leaf-cutters.

The females cut sections of leaves to build cells for their larvae to develop in. They are fun to watch and will happily use solitary bee hotels placed in a sunny spot. The females are similar in size to honeybees, but with a bright orange pollen brush on the underside of the abdomen. The male is less distinctive and difficult to tell apart from other solitary bees. Nests are made in natural cavities like dead plant stems, man made cavities like air bricks, and bee hotels. The bees gather nectar from a variety of flowers and are one of our important pollinators. The leaf cutting behaviour is interesting to watch, as the females collect discs from various leaves including roses, lilacs, honeysuckles and a selection of trees. The cutting is very rapid, only around ten seconds from landing to taking off with a section of leaf up to 1cm across. The bee flies away with the leaf in her jaws, holding it underneath her body like a surfboard! Inside her nest hole she will chew the leaf into a pulp and form it into a cell in which she lays an egg. The cell is provisioned with pollen and nectar and sealed before the next cell is begun. When the nest hole is full she will cap it off with more leaf pulp, leaving the young to develop over winter and emerge the following year. If you see the tell-tale signs of circular cuts in your rose leaves, no harm will be done to the bush, and you can celebrate the fact that you are providing a home to this fascinating little bee!



**Yes! These have been happily occupying the bee boxes that Ken has made and distributed amongst us this last year.**

**Phil**

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**I really wanted a dog.....**When I retired at the grand old age of 65, the only thoughts I had were to enjoy my freedom after a life-time of work. I would travel to see my family in Australia and the USA and.....get a dog. I had a photograph of myself and a colleague sitting on a wooden bridge over a stream in Shropshire, eating Snicker bars. In the background was a lady walking uphill with a golden retriever. Looking at the picture later, I was struck by the joyfulness of the scene and the thought that I would one day, be like that lady.

What happened? I'm still without a golden retriever but, instead, have several thousand bees living at the top of the garden. The bees were really my husband's idea and I wasn't convinced. In fact, the first time I was shown what was beneath a hive roof, I recoiled in horror. The smoke affected my contact lenses, the bees scared me witless, and I felt claustrophobic in the borrowed suit. So, what



changed? We went to Beetham nursery to a talk on 'Gardening for bees' by Julia. I was fascinated. We then did a weekend's course in Brigsteer..... and I was hooked. My husband soon lost interest and the bees became mine. It's 6 years since the bees arrived. I now have 3 WBC hives, 2 operational and 1 spare, and a mountain of equipment in the adjacent greenhouse and the potting shed. Winter days are spent making new frames and painting the 'lifts' white. I am obsessive about their welfare, hygiene and development. I have lost sleep thinking, planning and worrying about them. I have actually been known to creep out after nightfall with a damp cloth to wipe down the hives when birds have had the audacity to poo on the roofs!

On a philosophical note, I don't think we really 'keep' bees. I regard myself as a 'facilitator' providing a home, which they can depart at any time. They have been on the earth far longer than we human beings. They seem to tolerate us and our well-meaning interference. I cannot believe they give me so much pleasure. I visit them several times a day, ensconced in the greenhouse watching them working. They fly out of the hive like Exocet missiles, up and over the wall and across the field, on their relentless quest for suitable forage. Their return can be hilarious, trying to land with their heavy loads without mishap. Their newly drawn frames, fresh white larvae nestling at the bottom of a cell, rows of biscuit coloured sealed brood, and the queen strutting imperiously on the comb are a delight to see. Last summer I was astonished to hear a new queen piping her existence. It was unbelievably loud from such a small insect. Of course, it's not all plain sailing! You read the books, make your meticulous plans and then organise your inspection accordingly only to find that the residents have had ideas of their own. Queens can disappear and be magically replaced, honey can be consumed during a cold spell. Beekeeping is never dull or predictable. I love my bees. It's a solitary hobby that totally absorbs me. Looking in a hive has an effect on my emotional state; I am quiet, calm, reflective, methodical and respectful. I now understand perfectly the powerful impact this hobby can have on troubled souls.

Now....have I still time for that dog!

**Maggie H**

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**BEE FARMERS ASSOCIATION**

**Mentoring** Many people are attracted to the idea of starting beekeeping and Dick and I have been able to supply colonies of bees to some of those that have decided to take the plunge this year during Covid restrictions. Along with the bees we have offered mentoring and want to say what an enjoyable experience it has been. It could be just the reassurance of a phone call, a photo on WhatsApp or email, or a quick check through a hive. We have all been beginners and the bees still throw curveballs at us no matter how long ago that was, perhaps to remind us that we will still have things to learn about them until we are too old to lift a hive lid! I'd like to encourage anyone to team up with a "newbee" as a mentor - you really don't need to "know it all" – just a year or two with bees of your own is enough to enable you to pass on the knowledge you have gained. We have found it great fun and hope our mentorees feel the same.

**Sally**

### **Meetings**

**August 21st 2.00pm** Heron Hill Primary School, Kendal, LA97JH. Topic – Options for treating varroa. Other details to follow.

**September 5th 2.30pm** Levens Hall with Chris Crowder. Topic : feeding for winter. Park in the car park ready for a 2.30pm start.

**November 5th The Honey Show** - Brigsteer Village Hall. Doors open from 6.30pm

**Many thanks to those who have contributed to this edition of the Preveiling Wind : Bronny, Dick, Sally, Maggie, Jane, Rob, Nadia and Julia.**

### **Controlling Swarming: the Demaree Technique. ...a message from the head.**

I aim to have 12 production hives, in 2 apiaries. At the beginning of the swarming season, it's a bit daunting to consider the possibility of 12 becoming 24, so this year I've tried using a version of the Demaree technique, with 3 objectives. Firstly, to retain all the foraging bees; secondly to avoid having a break in the creation of new workers, thereby maximising honey production. Thirdly to ensure there is no increase in the number of productive colonies. However, to perform the Demaree technique you do need a second brood box, and I don't have enough of those. So, I've also removed queens into nuc boxes in several instances. Most of those colonies I've sold to new beekeepers.

When I've seen developing queen cups, laid up with royal jelly and an egg or small larva, I've carried out the following procedure: **Move** the existing hive to one side and put a new floor in its place. **Put a queen** excluder on top of the floor, followed by a brood box, filled with frames of foundation. **Remove** several frames of foundation from the centre of the new brood box and then add an empty super on top. **Start looking** for the queen on each frame in the old brood box. If you don't see her on a frame, shake all the bees on that frame into the new brood box. Remove all the queen cups and cells on that frame and stack it to 1 side.

**Continue** going through the frames either until you've found the queen or emptied the old brood box. If you do spot the queen, carefully remove any queen cells on that frame and add it to the new brood box, so long as it has brood on it. If it hasn't, shake the queen with the other bees off that frame and add a different frame that does have brood, but no queen cells, into the new brood box. You can then stop shaking the bees into the new brood box.

**Replace** the frames of foundation that you removed from the new brood box and then add a 2nd queen excluder on top of the new brood box. **Add** the super on top of the queen excluder, followed by the old brood box, which I now call the Demaree box. Check the frames that you didn't shake the bees off earlier for queen cells and remove any you find. Replace the other frames, from which you shook the bees. Add a 2nd super, followed by the cover board, if you use those, followed by the roof.

**After a week**, go through the frames in the Demaree box and remove all emergency queen cells. Shake the bees off the frames to make sure you don't miss any.

**After another week**, check that the queen is laying in the new brood box and remove the queen excluder underneath the box. Demaree instructions usually tell

you to remove this queen excluder after a week, but I prefer leaving it in place for longer. 3 weeks after you performed the technique all of the worker brood in the Demaree box will have hatched and you can remove that box unless you want to wait a little longer until all the drone brood has also hatched.



I should explain why I add a 2nd super. The first time I performed this technique, I discovered the bees were using the Demaree box as a super, filling it with honey. Fortunately, the frames were really clean, so I was able to spin out that honey, but now I prefer to add a 2nd super on top of the Demaree box. I've found this technique very useful this last few months, but I must admit that, probably because bee numbers remain high in these colonies, I have had to perform it twice on several hives, whereas had I carried out an artificial swarm or removed the queen into a nuc, there would have been a break in brood production and so the colonies would probably not have wanted to swarm again.

**Dick**



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## National Honey Monitoring Scheme (NHMS)

On the 27 April 2021, **Dr Anna Oliver** (molecular biologist, UKCEH Wallingford) gave a BIBBA webinar about the NHMS. UK Centre for Ecology & Hydrology are an independent, not-for-profit research institute, home to 500 scientists based across 4 sites in the country: Edinburgh, Lancaster, Bangor and Wallingford. They "*provide the data and insights that researchers, governments and businesses need to create a productive, resilient and healthy environment*"

The UKCEH National Honey Monitoring Scheme, in partnership with UK beekeepers, monitors long-term changes in the condition and health of the countryside. The Honey Monitoring Scheme is supported by national capability funding from UKCEH under the ASSIST programme, and it is led by Prof. Richard Pywell (UKCEH Wallingford). The aims of the NHMS are to :

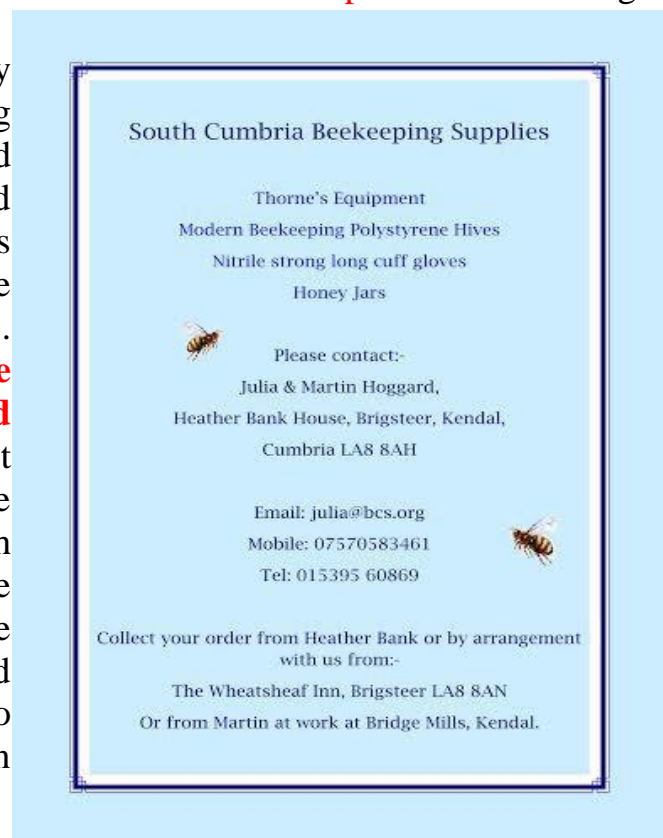
**Use** molecular barcoding to determine the diversity of plant DNA (pollen) found within 'snapshots' of UK honey. **Use** honey as a tool to monitor the environment (floral resources). **Identify** patterns and how they change over time. **Link** to environmental factors including: Climate and land-use change; pollinator health; agrichemicals; invasive species... **Provide** FREE and detailed information back to participants. **Create** a sample resource (Honey Archive) for future research.

**Investigate** pesticide residues (DEFRA pilot study). **Identify** current and emerging pathogens. Any active beekeeper can join on <https://honey-monitoring.ac.uk/>. The process in 5 steps: 1. Collection of honey from comb (beekeeper). 2. DNA extraction from pollen and honey in the samples (scientists). 3. Creation of "metabarcodes" and millions of pollen DNA read (scientists). 4. Bioinformatics to process the data and try to find "best matches" (scientists). 5. Results are returned. The data is fully anonymised. **The outputs of the scheme shared with the beekeeper are :** 1. The sugar and moisture content of the sample.

2. Pollen/plant species found in honey sample. 3. Habitat and crops surrounding the beehive. The scheme was launched in 2018 and 202 samples were returned (10 from the NW England) and this increased to 1109 in 2020 (47 from the NW England - highest 266 SE England).


**Dr Anna Oliver would like to see more beekeepers from the North of England to take part in the scheme** (the first step is to sign up to the above website and request a sample pack). The research is also looking at how variations in the landscape affect the diet of the honeybees. All the results are then used in research by other scientists, and also by the government, in key decision making.


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