

## **MCBK Secretary's Report on 2022**

(A full version of this report will appear in the CBKA 2022 Report and Balance Sheet which is sent to all Mid-Cheshire Branch Members)

As usual the year started with our branch AGM in **January**. Lesley Parker stepped down as Chair and Stuart Forbes stepped down as Secretary. This allowed Karl Colyer to be elected to both roles, with Lesley Jacques taking the role of Vice-Chair.

Two new committee members were added, Ian Turley and Jo Zielinski joining as general committee members during the AGM.

Mid-Cheshire is still the smallest CBKA branch having started on from the 2021 membership year with 76 members but is continuing to steadily grow with 32 new members joining in 2022. Along with natural churn and with some early new 2023 additions we close the calendar year just passing the one hundred membership mark for the first time.

A major new initiative led by Steve Purkis and Sarah Johnson was also started in January with the launch of the "Bee Chat" at the Blue Cap. This is aimed at attracting new and prospective beekeepers to come along to discuss and find out about beekeeping in a less formal surroundings than a branch meeting where people can come and go as needed.

In **February**, we were entertained by the excellent Mark Phillipson who gave his experiences and advice in beekeeping with "Getting Ready for Spring". This was particularly interesting for new and novice beekeepers as he gave useful tips on preparing for the coming year with examples of the equipment he uses both in normal hives and for queen rearing. He also gave some wise tips about not getting too comfortable in thinking we know everything there is to know and about thinking it is an easy hobby as the bees will surprise us all – little did we know how particularly relevant this would turn out to be with what the 2022 summer would bring!

In early **March**, we had our Beginners' Meeting attracting 35 people to the event; a brief introduction to the craft, allowing potential new beekeepers to attend our summer apiary meetings and even to acquire their own colony of bees during the same season. The meeting at the Blue Cap included a short introductory talk by Karl Colyer with the room laid out with various pieces of kit to allow lots of questions and the new beekeepers the chance of experiencing all the equipment needed.

In **April**, we started the month by "Making Colony Increases" with Bob Beards, who explained a rapid method of increasing your colonies developed by Miller. Amazing that within weeks you could go from 7/8 hives to 56 – Think of all that extra equipment!

Later, the "Bee Chats" moved outdoors with a more practical focus with Nick and Sarah Johnson hosting another first for Mid-Cheshire, with their "Beginners Taster Apiary Meeting" or more aptly "Introduction to Practical Beekeeping" sessions held in their apiary in Antrobus. The event allowed a first chance for new or novice beekeepers to actually look into a hive, hold a frame and to try and spot the queen – always an interesting task (and am sure Nick and Sarah are just using us to find their queen for them)! Expert tuition was provided with help from Karl Colyer and Steve Purkis.

From **May to August**, we started our summer events programme that included multiple branch apiary visits, Bee Chat apiary training sessions including comb exchange, queen rearing, swarm control, and varroa inspections. Thanks to David Wright, Lesley Jacques, Ian and Jane Turley, Nick and Sarah Johnson, Simon Raeburn and Ken Houghton for their hospitality and use of their apiaries.

In **June** we had a couple of external events with stands at Royal Cheshire County Show and Arley Garden Festival organised by MCBK.

**September** started our autumn events with Buckfast Abbey giving an enlightened zoom talk “Swarming – oops my bees have swarmed!”

Later in the month, Lesley Jacques gave a packed audience at Winnington Park Rugby Club useful lessons on preparing for winter.

In **October**, we were back to our indoor branch meetings with a pragmatic talk on “Breeding Out Bad Traits” from the CBKA Chair Peter Sutcliffe. Everyone left with a number of interesting facts and tips to think over and consider especially around the effects on others a poor queen can have (including her drones!)

We also launched our new website, which we hope will help to attract new members and to provide a useful resource to members.

In **November** we had a tremendous turn out at our yearly Honey Show at the Blue Cap with over seventy entries. The event was superbly judged by Joyce Nisbet, who provided an excellent running description on the judging process. At one point, we were concerned that the pub would close before the judging could be completed, such was the number of entries and the expert commentary by Joyce. Outstanding contributions from Sarah Johnson who won the greatest number of points and for Helen Parkinson for winning Best in Show for her “Frame ready for extraction”. A big thanks to Stuart Forbes for the organisation and to Lesley Parker for stewarding as well as expert judging by Joyce.

November also saw another first for Mid-Cheshire, with the start of our “Beginner Beekeeping Theory” course created and hosted by Lesley Jacques. The course was vastly oversubscribed and it is hopeful that this will be the first of many years of providing these sessions.

The last winter Bee Chat of 2022 was a slightly more subdued event, mainly due to poor weather and a certain football event. The next event will be at the end of January, where we hope to continue to attract new members and prospective beekeepers prior to our March 2023 beginner’s event.

We rounded-off the year with a superbly enjoyable meal at Blue Cap in **December**, organised expertly by Jo Zielinski, during which members and their guests discussed the highs and lows of their beekeeping season and their plans for 2023.

As a branch, 2023 approaches with a lot of optimism and excitement as we continue to grow and pass a major milestone; along with natural churn and with some early new 2023 additions we close the calendar year just passing the one hundred membership mark at 103 for the first time.

Our main aim now is to consolidate and continue to improve with membership growth and with our key objective being the addition of our own training apiary.

**Ian Turley** (Secretary)